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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FIRST GENERATION AND LASTING IMPRESSIONS:

THE GENDERED IDENTITIES OF PRAIRIE HOMESTEAD WOMEN

BY

NANCI L. LANGFORD

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSPHY

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

EDMONTON , ALBERTA
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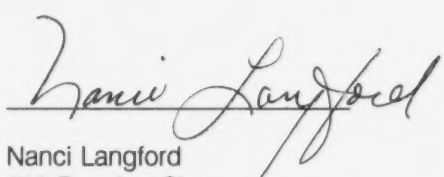

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DATE May 30, 1994

DEDICATION

My apprenticeship has been a lifelong journey, but I did not travel alone. This thesis is dedicated to three excellent guides, who helped me along the way:
John Dunphy, who got me started; Tom Goodale, who kept me going;
and Derek Sayer, who challenged me to make it my own.

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the lives of seventy eight adult women who migrated to the prairie provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan to homestead in the period 1880-1930. Based on their own writings and spoken words, this descriptive and analytical work explores both the content and contexts of their lives. It examines the ways in which new gender identities were formed in response to the migration and settlement challenges the women faced and to the nature of prairie society as it evolved.

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I would like to counter tradition and thank my family first. My husband, Rick Vanden Ham, and my sons, Michael and Cameron, have made life challenging and fun, and made this process tolerable. They accommodated my preoccupation with this task, my long hours in archives, and my numerous research trips. Rick assisted me with the technical work of formatting tables and maps. Both my sons missed hours of time that we could have spent together. These cannot be recaptured. I hope they do not feel this loss as much as I do.

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Chapter One: The Female Frontier

> Too often the history of the West is written as if it were an entirely masculine adventure. Actually, in my mind, it was the women who paid for it - the women on the farms, the women on the homesteads.
>
> Elsie Park Gowan

The success of migrants' settlement in western Canada was due to the presence of women. Women came to the Canadian prairies with men and on their own. They came from other parts of Canada, from the United States, and from Britain and Europe. They came from lives totally different from the ones they would establish on prairie farms and ranches, and somehow they adapted, and survived, all that men and nature brought to their lives.

From this process of migration, adaptation and developing survival skills emerged a new kind of woman. She was a person formed out of unique and difficult circumstances, out of a time period of great social change, and out of thousands of years of tradition. She was both liberated from her past and burdened by it. She was both free of social norms for her sex and limited by them. Above all, she was a woman whose life was formed as a response to her environment, both natural and social, and this was an environment that in most cases she neither chose, nor could she escape.

Histories of the settlement years on the Canadian prairies are notable either for the ways in which women are excluded from them, or for their hagiographic presentation of women. Rarely is the settlement experience described from a woman's perspective, as a woman's experience, and in her own words.[1] Pioneer mythology is for the most part built around the vision of the strong adventurous man, who is white and English-speaking, and who comes first to make the land habitable for the weaker sex. Yet we have ample evidence to show that women were part of the opening of western Canada, and that they were significant both in their numbers and in the vital role they played in ensuring the survival of their husbands and families and in populating the new communities.[2]

The influence of gender, class, ethnicity and settlement location are often ignored in romantic tales of the difficult but happy days of establishing a home and a business on the open prairie or in the uncleared bush. These are major determinants in the quality of homesteading life for both men and women, and as such influenced the decision to stay on the homestead or to abandon it. (See Appendix B for homestead regulations.) The less well known reality of homesteading in the prairie provinces is that the majority of those who attempted it were unsuccessful,[3] and moved on to other lifestyles in cities, or in other enterprises such as mining or lumbering. Some returned to their place of origin.

This study is based on the written and spoken words of women who came as adults to Alberta or Saskatchewan to homestead[4] on farms or ranches. In their letters, their journals, their memoirs and interviews, women describe their activities, their emotions and their thoughts as they carry out the struggle to survive and to thrive in a new lifestyle. Their words tell us that gender was fundamental to how people participated in settlement: individually, in family groups, or communally. The belief that this was a new society in which women experienced new freedoms and new opportunities is in many ways a distortion of lived realities. Although the new life was different from the one from which they came, most women keenly felt the restrictions determined by their sex. Indeed, some of the limitations became exaggerated because of the nature of their new environment: travelling distances, scattered and sparse populations, weather conditions, lack of social contact, no health or educational facilities, and evolving social norms. Next to gender, three other factors stand out as determinants of a woman's life: economic class, children and the location of the farm or ranch.

These influences circumscribed a homesteading woman's life. The interaction of their effects determined the quality of her life. But the major determinant of her success as a farm or ranch wife, and ultimately the success of the enterprise, did not rest on the woman's personality, as some writers have suggested, but on how closely she was able to follow the gender norms and expectations of the time and place in which she was homesteading. These norms and expectations change at different stages of settlement. The stages are defined by the settlement process itself, as it is experienced at different times across Alberta and Saskatchewan, not by the dates on the calendar.

The ability to adapt to changing gender norms and expectations as one passes through the stages of settlement is a fundamental part of the gendered identity of prairie farm and ranch women. Gendered identity, as a theoretical construct, is an expression of the ways in which women's lives are defined and circumscribed because of their sex. It is more than a question of biology. One's gendered identity emerges from a complex set of social interactions, mediated by the reality of biology and the artificiality of social prescriptions governing women's minds, hearts and bodies. For prairie farm and ranch women, their gendered identities were a combination of lives being defined by their relationships to others and of being created by the demands of their new lifestyle. These demands were ever changing and often extraordinary in the physical, mental and emotional responses required to meet them.

Although women appeared, at least initially, to be changing tradition by performing new roles and tasks on the frontier, what the new frontier society required of women was as narrowly defined and circumscribed as the lives from which they had come, and in some cases even more so. For some, success at homesteading, whether at the beginning of homesteading days, or as it was earned after years of hard labour, came at the cost of conformity to socially prescribed norms of behaviour that replicated old ideas about the roles of women and men in society, many of which did not fit the realities of pioneer life.

The concepts of "frontier" and "pioneer" merit some discussion and clarification. A frontier is any place that is not settled by anyone. Some would argue that the Canadian prairies cannot be considered a frontier because they were already inhabited by indigenous peoples. In that sense they remained a frontier only for the Europeans, British and Canadians who brought new types of settlement to the prairies, who endeavoured to set up lifestyles not previously attempted (and perhaps for good reason) on prairie soil. So when we speak of the Canadian west as a frontier, it is only a frontier for some, for others it is home. A pioneer is a person who initiates or starts something. Common usage has also made it a synonym for settler, or colonist; however, I prefer to recognize its broader meaning. A woman or man can be a pioneer in many different ways in a variety of settings. Most human pioneering of significance has nothing to do with living on a frontier. It is in that sense that we can say many women were already pioneers before they

came to the Canadian West, as evidenced by the accomplishments and activities that made up their lives "at home".

The beginning premise of this study is that the experience of homesteading was different for women than it was for men. The corollary to that premise is that a woman's gender was a significant determinant of the scope and quality of her life as a farmer or rancher. This occurs not simply as biological reality, but as a complex set of expectations, restrictions, and opportunities which are socially constructed for women on the frontier, because they are female. The homesteading experience in particular provides a vivid example of the ways in which a gendered identity is formulated. The interaction of time, place and events, as well as in the relationships a woman shares with others, accomplishes, through practice, a unique gendered identity. The casting off of some former gender norms, as required by the new circumstances in which members of a migrant family find themselves[5] is a part of this process. The development of new norms and the adaptations of many traditions demonstrate the variability of gendered identity as a social construction. In the development of a gendered identity, the individual sorts out and takes on many socially imposed activities and attributes, both as a member of a specific culture and as an individual trying to emulate the social ideal prescribed for her sex. Through what seems "natural" . . . a woman's body, the work she does, the clothes she wears, the feelings she expresses . . . runs a continuous process of negotiation, between what others want her to be, and what she feels is right for herself. This process of negotiation, constituted simultaneously of assimilation of and resistance to cultural norms which are products of social relations of dominance, lies at the heart of women's gendered identities. The variations over time in their expression in the lives of homesteading women demonstrate that gendered identities are always in a process of change. And at any given point in time, an "ideal" form of woman can be identified, a form that reflects the nature of relations between men and women, or the "gender order"[6] of the structures with which they interact to carry out their daily lives. It is in the expressions of comparison, of adaptation to the new and unexpected, and of a desire to measure up to the ideal of a good farm wife, that the gendered identities of homesteading women are revealed as a response to the gender order in which they find themselves situated. This

gender order is a product of the social relations that arise out of how women and men must work together to survive, out of their productive activities.

The prairie frontier presents an ideal situation to examine the sifting and shifting of gendered identities because of the clear division between a life before migration and the life adopted on arrival. Women remarked on the differences, and demonstrated with their lives the shifts that were taking place. They felt their own identities changing as what they did on a daily basis changed, though few could imagine the long term consequences of those changes.

One goal of this research is to demonstrate how gendered identities are formulated through practice, that is, through the choices and possibilities of women's lives as they experience them and create them. The implications of this study for theory are found in this demonstration. Essentially, the ways in which the practice of womanhood can be understood and how it becomes culturally encoded is the major theoretical outcome of this study.

In order to examine women's lives and the reconstruction of their identities, we must look at the social relations which are constitutive of their daily life. The first type of social relations are found in the family in which the homesteading woman lives and works. For some women this group was composed of fathers and brothers, for others, a husband, and perhaps also children; and for others, parents and siblings. For a few women, her family was composed of herself and child or children. Within the family, there are three essential sets of relations that can be studied. They are labour, power and emotional life.[7] Labour includes how work on the farm or ranch was organized and the way in which opportunities to participate in work activities were structured: what needs to be done, who plans it, who does it, and who is responsible for it. Homesteading is about work and little else. Work is the central organizing focus of the family because their survival depends on it. Some feminist theorists propose that gender identity is rooted in the sexual division of labour. This study presumes no division of labour according to sex, but will determine if there is a pattern in homesteading families that suggests labour is in any way assigned to the labourer on the basis of sex, or any other organizing principle or characteristic.

Because the homestead is a family enterprise, the power relations and emotional relations of the family overlap with labour. Power relations within the family encompass both decision-making and coercive power; and emotional relations include the emotional links and ties within the family, including the intimacy between men and women in marriage, and how they are enacted and transacted in daily life. This study attempts to determine the patterns of power and emotional relations as they contribute to the development of a gendered identity for the homesteading woman.

There were also social structures with which women interacted, individually and sometimes collectively. One of these is governments. In the case of the frontier, one may accurately say, the lack of governments, for it certainly was the absence of government services and interventions that most keenly affected the woman living on the homestead. Nevertheless government policy and legislation, as well as the absence of government assistance, radically defined the position and security of the homesteading woman in her family and in her community. The role of government in supporting the power structures of families, and in relation to women's labour and women's economic and social status is central to this discussion.

Each woman's life intersected at times with other women and men who were also homesteaders, or in other occupations such as doctors, nurses and storekeepers. Prairie society was very different from the well populated and structured societies in which many women had lived. In many cases, the absence of social contacts and of a social structure becomes as significant as the nature of any existing one. The changing nature of the social world in which each woman finds herself provides interesting transitions that women experience quite profoundly, and which demonstrate the critical role of the social environment in her new identity formation.

There is another influence on women's lives on the prairie frontier with which women interacted daily, and which served to form many of their choices. It is the natural environment of the prairies, its geography and climate, in relationship to which she finds herself attempting to create a viable existence for herself and her family. The relationship of the homesteading woman to the land is more than just one of husbandry, or even

tolerance. It is a very emotional relationship, with little room for sentimentality. It is characterized by emotional swings between love and hate, joy and despair. As a force in producing her daily life, natural environment dominates the homesteading woman's existence in many ways, and becomes a significant force in shaping the identities of those women who stay on the land, and even those who leave it.

The theoretical foundation of this study is that there are ongoing interactions between homestead women and the social and natural environments in which they live and work which shape for each woman a gendered identity, and it is that identity which in turn determines the nature of those interactions. This study attempts to determine how and in what ways this exchange created a new type of woman, and what characterizes this emergent form of womanhood. This form is so taken for granted in subsequent generations, that its being and becoming - the transformations that took place in that first generation - are almost invisible. Yet what occurred on the prairies over fifty years of hardship and toil has more than a material significance. Farms were built and prospered, children born and educated, but something else was also taking place. Women were changing the practice of womanhood, mostly through necessity, and in so doing, were challenging and altering the Victorian view of woman which had dominated relations between the sexes for decades. The cultural definition of what a prairie farm woman is and does would follow in the next generation, as conceptual adoption traditionally follows practice.

This study is undertaken with the belief that the new woman of the prairie frontier has been assigned mythical qualities that belie the real experiences and feelings of the first generation to turn prairie sod, and that the form of womanhood that emerged from the homestead experience was varied and complex. It is one of the great ironies of Canadian history that one of the periods and events that so largely shaped this country, the settlement of the prairie provinces has been so little studied and even less understood. Our knowledge of women's migration and settlement experiences is particularly wanting. The legacy of that generation of women, however, was very real and the way they adapted and formed new gendered identities in interaction with the environment and structures in which they found themselves became a profound influence on the generation

of women who followed them. The cultural view of woman, particularly in ranching and farming communities, was effectively altered in one generation. In its mythical and distorted forms, this view would serve both political and cultural goals in the twentieth century societies of both Alberta and Saskatchewan. The most common abuse would emerge in the evocation of a notion of a pioneering partnership between men and women based on equality of the sexes, respect for women, and acknowledgement of women's work. The view would also be distorted to produce willing and determined saints out of ordinary women, serving to deny women's disempowered and disadvantaged position in homesteading families and in subsequent generations.

Two types of sources provide the first hand accounts of women who homesteaded in Alberta and Saskatchewan during the years 1880-1930. One is published sources, and the other is unpublished archival sources. Published sources used in this study include autobiographical articles and books, published letters and memoirs. Unpublished sources include letters, memoirs, diaries and journals written by the women during or after their homesteading years, and oral history interviews, which are all recorded after the homesteading years have passed. Women's unpublished collections, writes Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "constitute gifts from the Fates, precious for having been preserved despite their very anonymity and supposed insignificance." [8] The reality of the homesteading years was that many women had neither the time or energy to record their lives. Also, many accounts from this time period are lost to us. This study is based on most of what is available in public repositories for homesteading women during the years 1880-1930 in Saskatchewan and Alberta. Many more such materials may be available in private collections which are unfortunately unidentifiable except by chance encounters with holders of these documents or their relatives.

This study is dependent on the use of materials that have survived for many years, and that someone had the interest in either publishing or preserving. Both the production and the valuing of first hand accounts by women raise questions about class status and ethnic background. Women who are more inclined to write the accounts and raise children who would preserve them are more likely to come from more privileged backgrounds in terms of education and access to other resources. This does not mean that these women were

necessarily well situated on the frontier, however. These are not the stories of a leisured class of landowners. But there is inevitably a relationship between cultural background and the motivation and ability to write about one's life in a deliberate, albeit at times prescriptive, way. Diary writing or the keeping of journals or logs is also historically situated as a popular activity. Both educated men and women of British background at the turn of the century accepted the practice of diary writing as a natural one. The migration to the prairies made the practice at times essential for survival, at the emotional as well as at the practical level. Many prairie diaries are also logs of work performed, goods produced and bartered or sold, and the financial accounts of the farming operation. Letter writing also became both an emotional outlet and a vital link to friends and relatives, who were sources of moral and practical support. The cultural influence on the writing behaviour of homesteaders, both the fact that they wrote and what they wrote cannot be denied. It is one of the important parameters of this study and is evident in the demographic profile of the group of women included in this analysis.

There are seventy-eight adult women in this study. These include several young women in their late teens who come with their families of origin to the prairies but assume adult women's roles, many of them marrying homesteaders within the first year of their arrival. The focus on adult women in this study is intentional. While many of the published accounts of homestead life are written by the children of the original homesteading couples, we still glean little from them that tells us about the experience from the migrant woman's point of view. This study attempts to capture her experience and perceptions in particular, and thus the choice to use first person accounts of the first adult women to come from other places to establish prairie homes.

The country of origin of the largest group of women outside Canada is the British Isles (35%), and most of the woman are English speaking. There are many foreign born women who have lived in other parts of North America before migrating to the west, either the United States (26%) or other Canadian provinces (31%). Only a few of the women were born in Canada, so that many of the transnational migrants were of British or European nationalities. The exceptions to the dominance of English-speaking culture in the group studied include women from Germany, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, and Norway. Together,

they constitute eight per cent (8%) of the group of seventy-eight women. This demographic pattern with respect to origins reflects the immigration statistics for Canada for this time period, as this table shows:

Immigration 1881-1931[9]

	Total	% of Total		
		UK	USA	Other Countries
1881	47,991	36	45*	19
1891	82,165	27	64*	9
1901	49,149	24	37	39
1911**	294,517	42	36	22
1921	138,728	54	28	18
1931	88,223	31	28	41

* information collected 1881-1891 on USA immigration did not distinguish between immigrants from other countries coming though the USA, and immigrants from the USA

** the bulk of immigration to Western Canada took place 1905-1914, peaking at over 400,000 immigrants to Canada in 1913

This study includes the accounts of women who arrived or began homesteading between 1880 and 1930. While this time span is wide, the opening of various frontiers, in various stages, makes this choice of time period essential. Northern land was often not settled till the 1920's, offering conditions and challenges to men and women not unlike those faced by others at the turn of the century in southern locations which were at first more accessible. The most significant growth in population on homesteads occurred in the decade 1901 to 1911 when the total population of the West increased from 419,000 in 1901 to 1,328,000 in 1911, and the number of farms on the prairies increased from 55,000 to 200,000.[10] Alberta continued to show significant increases in population into the 1920's, while Saskatchewan's growth began to taper off.

Socioeconomic class of these women is difficult to determine except perhaps through assessment of the occupations of the women or their spouses. Information on the education levels and professional training and experience of women in this group is not consistently provided, but of what is available, there are at least six women with university education, and at least sixteen of the women had some professional training and experience. The professions practised by these women before coming to the Canadian prairies include teaching, nursing, social work, business administration and government administration. As far as can be determined, eleven women had lived and worked on farms before, either with their parents or their husbands. More of these women might have had some experience living on a farm before homesteading, but it is not mentioned in their papers. Two of the women, both Canadian born women, brought a servant or servants with them to the Canadian west. Specific information on each woman is found in Appendix A.

The analysis of women's accounts is aimed at two principal goals: to describe the content of homesteading women's lives as they write about it; and to assess that content to determine the nature of the emerging gendered identities women acquire through practising the life and work activities both chosen by and expected of women in the homestead lifestyle, whether ranching or farming.

To accomplish this description and analysis, various "themes" are explored. The list of themes selected is not exhaustive. Many more could be explored. But these represent those experiences that make up the core of women's lives as they describe them. These themes were suggested by the content of the women's writings and are selected based on their commonality between most women, as well as their uniqueness to smaller groups of women who are part of the seventy-eight studied. These themes are not all equal in sociological importance. They are categories that capture the activities and events of women's lives, and as such are mere describers for complex sets of actions and interpersonal relationships. For example, "childbirth" is one theme. The varied experiences of women giving birth to children on the frontier are presented and analyzed with respect to the physical, emotional and social aspects of the experiences, including the social relations which these experiences involve. The themes chosen here, however realistically

they represent the subjective experiences of homestead life, are necessarily constructions, but are also essential for organization and interpretation of a wide range of rich detail found in homestead women's writings.

Included in the exploration of each theme are the other people women write about: for husbands, children, friends, neighbours, relatives and strangers are all part of the accounts women create of those moments of their lives they choose to share. "Lives are composed by a variety of social networks of others that the subject of 'a life' moves between" writes Liz Stanley.[11] Indeed, some of the diaries and letters are more explicit and detailed about the content of men's lives, as viewed by the women, than those of their female authors. This observation about women's writings is supported by Estelle Jelinek, who claims women's autobiographies are different from men's, and tend to be more personal and social in orientation, concentrating on domestic details, family members and close friends.[12]

The contexts and relationships in which women on the frontier live their lives are necessarily understood only as they present them. Their accounts are self-reflective as well as self-creating. They are not free of the human tendency to project desirable images of one's self, or one's loved ones. Most important, the identity that is projected in these autobiographical texts is larger than the roles a woman takes on in family and work life. It is a unique combination of the woman's constant sense of herself, in interaction with the social process of recording her life history, both of which are bound up in a relationship to the social and physical environment in which she is living.

A systematic approach to the analysis of autobiographical accounts must recognize the difference between the events and circumstances of a life, and the subjective re-telling of them. In the case of homesteading women, for whom the telling of the story is fundamental to the construction of new self-identities, the subjectivity of the text is a valuable resource to be mined. These identities are self-interpreted within the constraints of cultural possibilities, which in the case of homesteading women were often limited. This subjectivity is the "self" created in a specific place and time in response to particular conditions. There is a difference then between those accounts which are written

throughout the homesteading years, as women's lives are unfolding, and those that are written as memoirs, often years later. The latter are written in more reflective vein, and the years can change the way events and feelings are remembered. Sometimes the effect is to give a more positive and cheerful tone to the story. Sometimes the distance provided by passing years give women license to express feelings, like anger or disappointment, they might otherwise not have shared as the events they described were actually occurring. So time of writing had an influence on the kind of self-representation the women chose to convey.

The selection of autobiographical accounts, in all their forms, was based on three criteria: the woman arrived as an adult on the prairie and was not born and raised there; the account held sufficient material about homesteading to be informative; the account was written or spoken by the woman herself. No other criteria were applied to the selection process. There were no particular aspects of homesteading or of women's experiences which were actively sought, nor any political or philosophical tenor that was deemed desirable. The representativeness of the writings has already been addressed from the perspective of their authorship, which is culturally determined along class and ethnic lines. The homesteading stories gathered through oral history interviews present other issues about representativeness, as the selection process of subjects and biases of the researchers confound the process of life history making. There is no claim here that these accounts, as shared by these women, speak for all homesteading women on the prairie frontier. They do allow us to determine experiences and feelings common to these seventy-eight women, but they do not represent a statistical sample of all homestead women. Their common experiences are likely similar to those of many other women homesteading on the prairies during these years, so their value lies in the fact that they allow some exploration and discussion of similarities among women, while accommodating the reality of individual differences between women.

The accounts are not uniform in length, style or content. They range from a single letter written to a relative, to a series of diaries, full of detailed daily accounts, that share many years' worth of experiences. The types of material each woman produced are listed in the primary sources section of the bibliography. The task of organizing and analysing these

varied fragments and documents has necessarily focused on similarities and differences in experiences, as structured in the following chapters under themes.

There is no reason to believe that common experiences among these women means that all homesteading women shared the same life events and experienced them in the same way. The goal of this study is not to produce a typical life print of prairie homesteading women. Rather, these common experiences will be used to understand the structural barriers and social relationships of women's lives that lie at the root of this commonality, as well as those that explain the disparities.

This study is situated at an intersection of two emerging developments in the disciplinary areas of history and sociology. Particularly in American history, and increasingly in Canadian history, both popular and academic, there is a growing interest in historical and comparative analyses focused on the lives of farm women and on the experiences of women in settlement periods.[13] Eliane Silverman's oral history project in the 1970's has been the only Canadian collection authored to date that looks at settlement experiences of women in Alberta. However, only a small portion (10%) of her subjects were homesteading women who came to the prairies as adults, and some of those women's accounts have been included in this study. A forthcoming book describes the history of organized farm women in Alberta,[14] and local histories, of which hundreds have been written in Saskatchewan and Alberta, hold vast amounts of information about pioneering and about homesteading families. However, very little of it is written from the perspective of the settlers themselves, and as Voisey points out, there are real limitations to both the content and format of these accounts.[15] Individual autobiographies provide particular insights into the lives of individual women, but given the numbers of these published and unpublished memoirs in relation to the numbers of women who lived as homesteaders, they are small in number and only begin to tell the story. Some of the autobiographies are included in this study. Canadian prairie historiography as a whole can be characterized as deficient in its attention to the homesteading experiences of women and particularly to the relations between the sexes, and the development of gender ideologies.

This lack of a body of work, and thus also, loss of potential for informed debate in an important area of Canadian history is surprising. It limits the context in which this research can be placed. There is no possibility of a literature review of relevant or similar studies, as none exist. American scholars have pursued these topics and produced some interesting studies, but comparative studies of the two frontiers is impossible when the fundamental work on our own Canadian frontier is incomplete. This research is an attempt to work towards its completion.

In sociology, a new interest in the use of autobiography and biography to understand social structures, and to demonstrate the development of various social forms, is emerging. A focus on methodological issues surrounding the use of these types of texts is concomitant with this growing area of scholarship.[16] While the limitations of these types of sources have always been understood, their potentials have not always been fully explored.

This research is necessarily historical and also sociological. It is not intended to develop or prove a theoretical position, but to analyze historical information in a systematic way, to examine the relationships between the layers of social life that determine one's identity. Because this is a study based on historically produced documents of autobiographical content, it raises new methodological issues and problems. The documents themselves represent only a particular time and place in a woman's life as she viewed it or remembered it. We are not capturing her self-interpreted identity and in turn interpreting it, as if it were a constant and consistent reality, but merely as it presented itself at a moment in time. This snap-shot is, I believe, all we have. The organizing structure imposed on these snap-shots is necessary, but it is an instrument of interpretation, it is not benign. The value of using women's own words to share their lives with others remains the central tenet of this study. However we read and understand the meaning of those words, they are the real connection we have to a significant generation of women in our country's history. Their words tell us that the Saskatchewan and Alberta prairies were for a time in our history, and in many ways, also a female frontier.

Chapter Two: Adjustment and Apprenticeship

> Imagine the average greenhouse flower transplanted to the sudden impartiality of open soil and you have in epigram all that follows.
> Mary Lawrence

Life before

The universal characteristics of the first generation of homesteading women were that they are all migrants, they came from another place that they considered home, and that they had a full life and an identity in that former place. It is important to understand the significance of that other place they called "home". Many women never transferred their "home" feelings from that place to their prairie homesteads. Home was the place that shaped them, that gave them a sense of who they were, and how they fit into the world they knew. The identity they carried with them is almost routinely ignored or forgotten by historians of prairie settlement. The presumption is almost one of a re-birth upon arrival at the homestead, that the woman is nobody until she set foot on the land that was to be her new home. This view may not be totally artificial in its attempt to down-play the "life before".[1] Many women no doubt felt they were shedding the protective cocoon of their former life, with all its comforts, familiarities and limitations, to be assaulted and ultimately transformed by the new environment in which they found themselves.

Suddenly they faced the first harsh contradiction of their new life: what they were before did not matter at all, and yet it could determine the success of their new venture; what they left behind was of no consequence, yet it was all that they had ever known, and it was suddenly more important and more cherished than ever. Women's letters and diaries highlight at times this bittersweet longing for a past that cannot be recaptured or duplicated and a place they may never see again. The social relations and cultural legacy of their 'life before' presented women with a real challenge in their new lives on the prairies: how to let go of it and yet still value it; how to retain those aspects of it that were important, while not expecting life to be the same. Their past was an essential part of their present, and would influence to a significant degree the ways they approached their lives on prairie homesteads. Like many immigrants in other countries, this first generation lived

their first years on the homestead with what can be characterized as one foot on their "home" land and one foot on prairie soil, but "home" was never discussed.

"I don't dare let myself think of home and the people there much or I don't think I could stay here" Lillian Turner writes in a letter home to her mother in Ontario and she adds, " I get a little blue when I think about things sometimes, but time soon goes and I will be coming home some day".(Turner 1906)[2] Marie Rudd relates feelings about her homeland:

> Yes I missed Norway very much the first, I did. I didn't let anybody see I was crying about it, but I cried many times. And I thought if I could just pack my things and go right back . . . .(Rudd 1927)

And Mrs. John Deyell writes in her memoirs "Yet there was always that longing for the homeland and it took many a year to overcome that longing". (Deyell, 1887-)

The contrast between the life before and the life they came to on the prairies was more than an awareness of loss of comforts, of good housing and of access to material goods. For many women it was the loss of intellectual companionship and stimulation, of a chance to practice their professional skills, and of the contact with and support of friends and family that were most keenly felt. This particular group of seventy-eight women may be exceptional in their educational backgrounds, as discussed in chapter one. However, an appreciation of what they gave up in their former lives help us to understand the enormous adjustments and adaptations they had to make to their new lives on the homesteads. At a time when women were just entering professional careers, a significant number of these women had already been pioneers, training as nurses, teachers, artists, and business women, and most had some training in music. Some of them gave up their financial independence as self supporting working women, a sense of worth from doing socially useful work, and the friendships and social life that went with being a part of the work force and an established community. Most of these women had to also give up their private pleasures that they found in making beautiful things, making music, performing in dramas, attending performances of all kinds. Music, dances and flowers became so important to women on the prairies because they were the few things from former lives that survived migration. Most painful was the loss of a network of other

women with whom they shared their lives. Friends, sisters, aunts and mothers provided in their former lives a special women's culture of mutual interests and support, critical to the well-being of all those involved. With migration, these networks could only be maintained through letters.

These were talented, spirited and resourceful women who enjoyed the competencies and achievements of their lives "at home". These women arrived with a sense of who they were, even if it took migration and harsh conditions to make them keenly aware of that self-knowledge. And who were these women? Many, like Monica Hopkins, Esme Tuck, Alice Hickey, Edna Banks, and Catharine Neil were young brides whose first home of their own was the cabin their new husband had prepared for their arrival on the homestead, or a tent they shared while they built their first home. They had the double adjustment to make to both a new environment and lifestyle and to married life. For some this adjustment began on the same day, as they married the man they had chosen the day they stepped off the train that brought them to the prairies. Married women without children make up 37% of the group included in this research. This cohort includes women who were married and established in homes before migrating to the prairies and those who were newlyweds.

Others, like Sophie Miles, Elizabeth Rockford Covey, Mabel Barker and Jennie McLean, were grown up daughters who accompanied their parents to the prairies but found on their arrival they had to make a life of their own, and so became busy as domestic workers, as clerks and as teachers until marriage, which was usually to a homesteader. These young women account for 9% of the women in this research. Domestic work in the homes of other homesteaders was often the only available occupation to many women when they arrived. The absence of schools, hospitals and businesses meant that the training they may have brought with them as teachers, nurses and clerks was useless in the prairie except in its domestic application. Where towns or settlements were established, women could work as clerks in stores, as postal clerks, or as teachers, but these positions were rare. The exception in this group is Henrietta Campbell, who came west as a single woman with a family that employed her as a domestic servant, not with her own parents. She soon married and farmed with her husband in several locales.

Some women, like Sarah Roberts, Amelia Lucas, Alice Rendell and Maria Szmyrko came as experienced wives and mothers (32% of the group of women in this study), whose adjustment to the new life was immediately burdened with worries about how to feed, clothe and educate their children where commodities and services were scarce and expensive. Among this group, more than the rest, the resources with which the family arrived made a significant difference. The life of Amelia Lucas who lived on her ranch in relative comfort with the assistance of household help is in stark contrast to that of Alice Rendell and Sarah Roberts, whose hardships were many and whose concerns for the safety and well-being of their children was well-founded. This group includes widows with children (two out of the seventy-eight studied) who felt that homesteading might offer them an opportunity to make a living for their family and still be with their children while doing it. They were, as widows, designated legally as heads of their families, and as long as they had children under the age of eighteen, they were eligible to take up free homesteads under the Homestead Act. Only women in this situation were able to do so.

The fourth type of woman to arrive on the prairie was the single adventurer, the woman who wanted to come to seek a new way of life. These women constitute 22% of the group in the study. Georgina Binnie Clark and Mary Inderwick are two women who made the decision to come to the Canadian West, at first to join their brothers. Binnie Clark chose to stay to grain farm on her own purchased land. Inderwick became pregnant and married a rancher within a year of her arrival. In both cases, their brothers preceded them to the prairies, and the sisters joined them out of a desire for adventure and new experiences.

The decision to emigrate

The "single adventurers" stand out as different when one looks at women migrating to the prairies, because they freely chose to come. Most women did not. Their "decision" to migrate to the prairies is more accurately described as going along with the plans of their mate or their parents, and making the best of it. Not all married women or adult daughters

came begrudgingly however. For some there was excitement, a real sense of new beginnings, and new opportunities. What they all shared in common is a complete lack of understanding of what the decision really meant, of how it would change their lives.

Some of the single women came to visit relatives, and liked what they saw, or who they met, enough to stay. Others sought a new life in the west in response to illness, or to pursue work opportunities. None of these women sought marriage as a purpose for coming to the prairies, although the demographic composition of prairie society certainly favoured women's marriage prospects. The 1916 prairie census shows that in Saskatchewan the male to female ratio for the 20 to 34 age group was 2:1 and in Alberta for the same year and age group it was 3:1.[3] And this research shows that of sixteen single women who ventured into Alberta and Saskatchewan on their own, twelve of them were married and homesteading within a year of their arrival.

Overlapping both the cohort of single women and of the married women is a unique group of newly married women. What is important to remember about this group of women, who constitute 51% of the group studied, is that the decision to marry was also a decision to homestead, one being a condition of the other. The marriage took place immediately before or immediately after migration to the prairies. Several of the women's accounts reflect this reality:

> The autumn of 1898 used the trowel of marriage to lift me out of the normal routine of an Indiana girlhood and start me west on the first stage of a journey into the wilderness of the Canadian north.. . I was a mere slip of a girl . . . but confident in the six sturdy feet of my husband . . .(Mary Lawrence, 1898,1)

And Beatrice Whitehair claimed "it didn't really make any difference as long as I was with Tom I didn't care where I was going".(Whitehair 1907) For Edith Lawry, homesteading came with marriage: "he had been out in 1912. And he wanted to farm. And we had been friends and corresponded so when he came back visiting during the war and after the war was over we got married and come here."(Lawry 1919) And Alice Self found herself waiting for her parents to die so that she could join her prospective husband on his homestead. "I thought if it was something he wanted, then I was quite willing too". (Self 1912) And Hilda Rose poetically described her motivation: "it's a self-imposed exile for me

. . . love for your mate makes you daring, but it has its compensations."(Rose 1928,124) "Harry loved the land and I would go wherever he went" wrote Peggy Holmes in her memoirs. (Holmes 1980,73) And in a more practical tone, Mary Edey explained "I'd decided to get married and come out . . . I did it on my own so, I thought well, I had nobody to blame . . . "(Edey 1914)

For some families with children the decision to migrate to Alberta or Saskatchewan was a response to a crisis in the family that forced the family to look at the availability of homestead land as one of the few survival options left to them. This was true for Canadians, Americans, as well as British and European immigrants. And it was true for both younger families and families with older children and parents. Sarah Roberts explained the family's circumstances, that through illness her doctor husband had lost his practice, and his income and savings had vanished. "We hoped through this venture, to be able to acquire a competence for our declining years, which are almost upon us, and, even more, we hoped that we could help our children."(Roberts 1968,4) And Harriet Johnson Neville related how her husband's lay off at his Ontario firm prompted them to consider homesteading as the only possibility of ever having a home of their own. Mrs. William Ireland explained that "things were a little tight" on their farm in Desmoines, Iowa, and as a result her husband wanted to claim homestead land in Alberta.(Ireland 1910)

Relatives often tried to deter the women or the families from leaving their place of origin to move to Saskatchewan or Alberta. This occasionally took the form, as in the cases of Monica Hopkins and Alice Self, of trying to stop the marriage to the prospective husband, who was already homesteading, from taking place at all. These actions were based on concern for the women and the life they would lead on a prairie homestead, as well as the wish to have them stay closer to home. "He knew I was the only girl in the family and they didn't want me to go. And I said well Bram's my husband, where Bram goes I go" Mary Unger related.(Unger 1924) Mary Inderwick's determination to venture west was matched by her father's determination to stop her.

> My father absolutely refused his consent and said he would not give me a penny. I said I did not need the money and I was sorry but I would go without his consent. My father begged me to be careful on the journey . . . he seemed afraid for me but I was not afraid - and bound to go - my brother's warnings

> about the dull life, the hardships of living with him among rough men did not daunt me for a moment - I despised society - I was not afraid of hardship. (Inderwick 1884)

And Mary Edey reported: "Mind you we came against their wishes. My mother didn't want me to come and my husband's people didn't want us to come. But my husband had been out here the year before and he liked it you see. He wanted to come so I just came with him."(Edey 1914) Mary Dawes told how her father said "Now you're making a big mistake, you and Fred never done farming. You don't know what it's going to be like. You're going all away from your people", and then when she and her husband Fred were leaving all the relatives said "You'll never make a go of it. You've never been used to it."(Dawes 1922) And Maria Potter wrote in her memoirs "Our folks thought we were going to the end of the earth and my husband's old uncle said to him " she will not be alive in two years." (Potter 1884)

Some young brides, like Kaja Froyen, were too excited about their new marriage and new life ahead to appreciate their families' feelings. "Well they all cried, but I did not see as I could not find anything to cry about. I just enjoyed the idea of going." (Froyen 1904) For widows determined to be self-supporting, homesteading seemed like the opportunity of a lifetime. Lena Kernen Bacon wrote in her memoirs "It was a new venture and my hopes soared high. I saw my dreams come true. At last I was started on my way."(Bacon 1904)

Some women blamed the advertising of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian Government for enticing their men to the west. Mary Cummins describes its impact:

> At the time the CPR was plastering the country with fascinating pictures of glorious wheat fields on the great western prairies. There was a fortune for everyone in three years not to mention glittering promises of practically free land. Hopes were high. So we, poor fools, fell into the trap. (Cummins 1883)

And the words of Mary Tennis captured the feelings of many women trying to deal with their husband's decision. "It all seems like sort of a nightmare to me. But if others have gone through such experiences, so can I. I'm following my husband in blind faith that we shall, in some way, be able to work things out."(Tennis 1926)

On the Canadian prairies, as elsewhere, women's participation in the decision-making that led to migration was variable. Some women took the initiative to plan their own or their families' migrations; others demonstrated a passive and reluctant acceptance of their husbands' decisions to homestead. In between these, were decisions based on careful discussion and mutual agreement between husband and wife, sometimes based on a need to find a solution to family financial problems, and sometimes based on seeking adventure and new opportunities.

Whatever the relations between men and women in migrant families, the propaganda on homesteading in the west, designed to entice settlers to the prairies, almost completely ignored the female half of homesteading partnerships. Despite the availability of information and advertising directed particularly at British women, describing the opportunities and conditions which the Canadian West had to offer,[4] the invisibility of women was characteristic of the approach to homestead families. One of the publications specifically addressed to women, written by a female British author, refers to "homesteaders" and makes it clear that she means only the men.

There is no doubt, in the writings of these women, that homesteading was not for many women the ideal choice of lifestyle or occupation. Many women had no idea what they were agreeing to as they took their marriage vows, or planned their trip to the Canadian west. Many felt pressured by poor circumstances at home, or by loyalty to or love for their husbands, to try homesteading. Many believed that they could do it for a little while and leave when they wished. When men decided to homestead, women had few alternatives but to join them. "Two can dream better than one" wrote Margaret Thompson.(Thompson . 1919) Men were dependent on their women to make their dreams come true. Some men never considered that their wives and daughters might not share their dreams.

The journey

For most women the journey to their land in Alberta and Saskatchewan was the first exposure they had to the reality of their new lives. Exhausting, and often full of trying circumstances and conditions, these travels were part of their initiation into homesteading life. Some described it as an experience they will never forget.

The common characteristics repeated in accounts of journeys were the unbearable length of them, the weariness they brought, and the terrible experiences on Canadian trains. Magdalena Zeidler described her trip:

> Four days it took out of the country and then we had to wait for the boat in Germany for six days, until we got the boat to come in. And it was twelve days on the ocean to travel. And then we came in St. John, was our landing place. And then we stayed overnight there and they told us to buy some food. It took us six days to come here to Olds. And I had a child ten months old that time. (Zeidler 1910)

In the spring of 1907, Clarissa Althouse and her husband took the Canadian National Railway from Ontario to Battleford, Saskatchewan, and the train journey took them almost three weeks because of the snow on the tracks. From Battleford they travelled by covered wagon to their homestead, a journey of one hundred and twenty-five miles which took them two weeks. As she related in her memoirs:

> the stock was on the railroad journey over two weeks, which left them unfit for the exposure to the cold nights and the long walk to the homestead. The trail seemed endless. The horse took sick,and we spent a few days with it in our tent. . . . We arrived safely but weary and tanned like indians, from being exposed to sun and wind for so long. (Althouse 1907)

The story of Mrs. Cayford's journey must be understood in the context of a woman who was seven months pregnant, caring for six children, cooking for two families en route, and walking most of the many miles from Bow River, to their new homestead fifty miles from Lloydminster. After this arduous journey, they lived in tents for the winter:

> Four long weeks we had followed the trail, which was the only mark of someone having been there before us, anxious as to what the outcome would be. We were sunburned and travel stained . . . we camped on our homestead

> on the night of August 20, just one month after leaving Bow River. . . . We had at last arrived but the hay had been cut here and we must get to where it was plentiful, for time was getting short. We went a little bit further on and camped for the winter near a big hay flat. The men decided to put the hay up together and I was to cook for them all, as before. So we made one tent a kitchen and dining-room combined. (Cayford 1903)

Many travellers were confronted with unpredictable weather and conditions. These included burnt-out prairies where no water could be found to feed livestock, snow storms in May, sloughs of mud and water where trails used to be, heavy spring run-offs that made creeks and rivers impassable, horses who died en route, or panicked in crossing rivers. Some travellers were surprised that there were no places to eat or sleep along the way except their own wagons, or that the accommodations they did find were lacking in comfort and cleanliness. The contrast for many women between their previous life and life on the trail was indeed a rough initiation to prairie conditions. Margaret Smith shared her experiences:

> We met lots of indians and others, nothing outstanding till we arrived in North Battleford. Not a house, nothing but prairie. We expected a village. Nowhere to eat and nowhere to sleep. That was an adventure for us I think. We arrived in North Battleford in April 1906, then got to Eagle Hills after getting oxen and wagons parked at the Battle River while we got all we needed in that way, and got snowed up for several days in the hills. Finally landed on the prairie fifth of May in another snowstorm so guess we did not feel very elated and had to get a tent up. No water no nothing but rolling prairie which had just been burned and was a sorry sight. (Smith 1906)

Alice Rendell described her journey as a member of a large group of Barr Colonists travelling overland from Saskatoon to Lloydminster:

> after four and a half days trekking through most perilous country . . . . Very few got through the journey without some serious loss of baggage or horses. I have a fair amount of courage but it has been taxed to the utmost the past few days. The children have been most plucky . . . It has been bitterly cold camping out some nights, two degrees below freezing. Still we are alive and contemplate continuing our journey to the Settlement tomorrow . . . another 70 miles. We have our camp stove and start and end the day with a good foundation of porridge which we all find a splendid thing to keep us warm and satisfied. . . . We cannot be too thankful that we are all safe thus far. There have been so many mishaps and no wonder, the bogs, ravines and gullies are really fearful . . . . We are enjoying a rest today . . . although we

> have passed through so much already our courage is still undaunted . . . . On leaving Battleford we had a 90 mile journey through most awful country shaking us all to pieces, sometimes charging across great streams and gullies, at others driving through thick scrub. After a long day's journey we arrived at the government tent simply perished with cold and hunger. By the time we reached Mr. Barr's camp I think we all felt weary, worn and sad. (Rendell 1903)

Lillian Turner wrote a detailed account of her journey in letters home to her mother in Ontario. Some of it was written in transit as she travelled to join her husband in Saskatchewan:

> The train jolts so much there isn't much use trying to write. I will have plenty of lunch to last me out on my journey from Saskatoon. I have not heard anything but N. W. since I boarded the train. Nearly everyone is going there . . . . Several people are sick. Just like sea sickness, but I am getting on fine. There are only six women in our car . . . I had to take a day coach then to McLean. It was a little tiresome, sitting up all night, as the train was crowded . . . [arriving in Saskatoon] The hotels were so full we came near not getting a room. They have cots put up in the halls, parlours and everywhere where one will go for men to sleep in . . . . We expect to start out about nine o'clock in the morning. It will take us three days to reach the homestead. . . . Well we did not get started for the homestead until Monday noon. It was very hot that day [April]. We stopped about sixteen miles and stopped for the night. The house was just about the best looking one we had passed and looked fairly clean inside . . . . Well, we went to bed upstairs, which was not furnished, had curtains hung around the beds for us and the rest which were all men, slept outside. I had not been in bed long when I began to roll from one side to the other and wonder why I could not sleep. It wasn't long before the thought struck me that there were lice in the bed. . . . We managed to get through the night and then investigated. You can imagine our horror when we found the edges of the sheets and every crevice in the bed infested with bugs and lice. You can bet I was sick and glad to get away . . . . Well we started on about 7 o'clock and everything went all right until about 10:30 when we came to one of those bad holes in the trail. We nearly got through it when one wheel sunk and could go no further . . . You can imagine our plight, not a house for five miles. All there was to do was to wait for someone to pass . . . . About this time, bed bugs seemed small to this trouble . . . . The next day my face began to burn in good earnest. I broke out with hives and by that night, I was good and tired. The wind blows all the time here and if it does happen to quit a few minutes, the sun is burning hot. Stayed at Wilsons' the next night . . . reached home the next night about 8:30. My face is tanned copper colour and over my nose is blistered, but are getting better now . . . I don't see how people can travel and like it. Mr. but I was glad to get off the train. (Turner 1906)

Lillian Turner's experiences were typical of those of other women travelling to the prairies. More than any other aspect of the trip, the immigrant trains are vividly remembered. Marie Rudd, coming from Norway in 1927, recalled:

> And then we were to sit on this train on the hard wooden benches for eight days on this, not very nice to see, all around there was nothing to see. . . . Well it was three o'clock in the morning we come in there. And we had been sitting on the train for four nights and didn't have a sleep . . . nothing to sleep on . . . Just sitting on hard benches and I had two little cushions with me and a little blanket so I put her [daughter] in the seat where I was sitting and then my brother was sitting close over by me there. They had to do that, they were just all gone when we come. (Rudd 1927)

Alice Rendell was particularly disgusted with the state of Canadian trains:

> I have heard a great deal about the travelling on the C. P. R. and being a shareholder too, felt a special interest in it. I have always understood its cars and accommodation to be unequalled for comfort and luxury but if you substitute for the latter two terms discomfort and misery you will be nearer the mark. I can only say the third class carriages on the English Railways are king to the filthy cars we were huddled into. No sleeping accommodation and as to the lavatory arrangements, they were simply a disgrace to civilization and in this misery we were boxed up to spend just on a week. . . . With so many little children to be cared for it was a wonder there was not a serious outbreak of illness. Owing to the overcrowding of the carriages it was almost impossible to get at our provisions and many a time we felt faint and famished with hunger to say nothing of being starved with the cold. (Rendell 1903)

Kaja Froyen's first days of married life were spent on the train from North Dakota to Wetaskiwin. Like many other women, she remembered the rigours of the train ride more than the subsequent long uncomfortable ride on a wagon, where, unlike the train, she was exposed to the elements and shaken up by rough trails.

> We were to take a sleeping car from Valley City, North Dakota, so we ordered a berth. That was the last time I slept in a berth. The window was just a little opening, and I had to undress in the dark bed. I hardly slept; just couldn't breathe. I thought this was going to be a long honeymoon journey. . . . then the hot and dusty days on the train! The children crying, eating, spilling on the floor and that bad odour. The nights were chilly and more quiet. It took Monday till Thursday afternoon at three before we arrived at Wetaskiwin . . . (Froyen 1904)

"I really think the railway journey is the most trying of the whole trip" wrote Eliza May (May 1888) and Edna Banks would agree with her:

> I shared a double seat with an elderly lady, her married daughter and her small child. I'm sure they must have wished that I had gone elsewhere, and I would have, if I could have, for there was no position in which any of us could sit or sleep but straight up . . . the third night was another bad night for sleeping, or else our nerves were becoming frayed . . . the weary passengers restlessly tossed and twisted themselves into all sorts of shapes and postures, trying too hard to be comfortable and get some sleep. (Banks 1911)

What is striking about the stories women share about their journeys to the homesteads is the range of emotions they experience and report, particularly as the journey comes to an end. Mary Lawrence spent weeks travelling through the Northern wilderness to her future home in Fort Vermilion. She wrote in her memoirs:

> I felt the North closing in around me . . . I remembered fragments of poems written about the Yukon but equally descriptive here, telling of the vastness, the aloneness, the silence you almost could hear. The long weeks of travel were at last taking their toll upon me in weariness . . . And when I saw it, the first landmark of the home I had journeyed seven hundred long wilderness miles to see, my fortitude snapped, and I burst into uncontrollable weeping. (Lawrence 1898, 27)

For many the end to the long journey was a moment of rejoicing. "We started out feeling very much refreshed, lighthearted and gay, as this was the commencement of the last day of our weary trip" wrote Ellen Lowes.(Lowes 1885) Elone Stobaugh reported looking at each other "with glowing faces" as they arrived on their homestead land.(Stobaugh 1929) "Still it was wonderful how cheerful we were. There seemed to be something grand about the hills and our spirits were high for we were going to make our pile, which goes to show we did not know where we were going" wrote a wiser Margaret Smith in her memoirs.(Smith 1906)

For most women, the journey was a harsh introduction to their new lives and undermined any enthusiasm they may have felt about their futures. Peggy Holmes wrote that she felt "sore in body and spirit" when she arrived at her land.(Holmes 1922,74) Mary Inderwick,

for all her adventurous spirit, reported feeling lost and deserted on her arrival, and Edna Banks was forthright about her feelings as she stepped off the train in Regina:

> When I left the brightly lighted overheated train, I stepped into a first class Saskatchewan blizzard. The wind screamed go home! go home! and to tell the truth I did have a brief wild impulse to get back on the train, even if it was going in the wrong direction.(Banks 1911)

Few of those who travelled were able to keep their high hopes intact, and those who did often had a rude and instant adjustment to make as they looked upon their future home for the first time.

Initial impressions

Women observed the countryside around them and the amenities of the nearest town as they travelled to the homestead, and the reality of what lay ahead began to sink in.

> What a drive. I shall never forget it, not a house or anything in sight. The more you looked the more prairie you could see and what a long drive. You can imagine my thoughts, what was I going to do, how about washing, ironing, shopping, the mail and were there any women or children around and how far, and could you buy food out there and a thousand and one things flashed through my mind. How long it would take to build a house and would we get the lumber and the furniture etc.(Emma Richards 1906)

The landscape itself was foreign and unwelcoming to some. "All afternoon there had been no fences, no trees, no landmarks and not many buildings and we had not seen anybody on the trail" wrote Edna Banks.(Banks 1911) And Mable Barker's first impressions were not positive either:

> When we landed in Shepard there was just a little meagre station, it was about a box you might say. When we got off this train we had to jump down off it into the gravel. It just struck me as terrible. And then of course everything was open. There were no fences or anything for miles . . . the roads were all prairie trails. . . . Oh yes the bald prairie did bother. (Barker 1912)

The lack of trees on the prairie is mentioned by many writers as a feature of the landscape they missed the most. "I had no idea what I was coming to. It was a drastic change . . . The worst thing I felt when I got off the train was no trees . . . I could have just died." These were Mary Edey's words as she recalled her arrival on the prairies years before. (Edey 1914)

Another feature of the landscape that both awed and terrified women was the vast open spaces of the prairie. Mary Inderwick, travelling west in 1884 reported from her train ride that she was impressed by the "wide empty spaces - the space! - the emptiness! - the unendingness of it all . . . in that yellowing country - a bit browny, a bit dingy" (Inderwick 1884) and Evelyn Springett wrote in her memoirs :

> Never shall I forget that first night on the prairie! . . . The vast and terrifying silence of the snow-covered prairie broken only by sudden gusts of wind and strange unaccustomed noises, frightened me. I was tired out and homesick and horribly lonely. . . . With the greatest difficulty I managed to creep under the heavy, hairy buffalo robe, and there I lay, shivering with fear and cold, all through the longest night I can remember. (Springett 1893,84-85)

And Alice Rendell noted in her letters home "skirting some of the great lakes there were some grand bits of scenery but not a sign of life, no birds, no cattle, the vastness of it all just strikes one with awe."(Rendell 1903)

"I remember thinking, home was never like this" Clara Middleton wrote in her memoirs as she described her first reaction as she viewed from a distance the "tent set on a rise above a little creek bed" that was to be her first Alberta home.(Middleton 1904,5) Perhaps more than any other factor, the sight of their future homes was the biggest shock for many women. Many women were greeted by nothing but a bald piece of prairie or an acreage of dense bush. Others gazed with incredulity upon the tiny rough shacks which their husbands had built.

> Oh I nearly died. Never mind about my first glimpse of the farm, when I went there it was how could we make a bush into a farm? We'd never been here. . . . And I looked, now have we got to chop all those trees down and break up the land and how are we going to do it? (Mary Dawes 1922)

Margaret Smith related in her memoirs:

> The first thing the men did was go to the bush for firewood and they left the women folk on the Prairie with not a dwelling of any kind. It seemed a terrible place to live, nothing to be seen and nothing to do until the men returned from the bush. We had no well and had to get water from a sleugh [sic] and strained it through a cloth. As I write this I cannot understand how we kept going with the things we had to put up with, yet we seemed to think it was part of the plan.

Tears and stunned silences were women's most common reactions to seeing their dwellings for the first time.

> at the sight of "home" I had come to I burst into tears. "Am I to live in that?" I cried, quite forgetting how hard Colin must have worked to build that little wooden box. It measured 16 by 16 feet with a partition down the middle to separate the kitchen from the bedroom . . . I had brought all sorts of house supplies out with me but they looked terribly out of place in that rough shanty. (Mary Cummins 1883)

"I am afraid I didn't share Lloyd's cheerful enthusiasm for our new home as I crawled down from that loaded wagon so cold and miserable I could have cried. . . . I had been told the house was small but I was not prepared for one quite as small as this" wrote Mary Tennis in her memoirs.(Tennis 1926) And Evelyn Springett's first day on the ranch was recalled in the same way:

> With the anxious eyes of my husband upon me, I was swallowing my tears and hoping that my courage would be strong enough to carry me through. . . . My prairie home was a small one-storey affair, built of clapboard and painted grey. . . . I confess, when I first saw it my heart sank within me, it seemed so small and bare and ugly.(Springett 1893)

Kathleen Strange recalled her thoughts on her arrival at her future home:

> how hopelessly unattractive and different it all seemed . . . it will surely be understood how difficult it was for me not to feel shocked and repelled at what I saw, particularly as it was in such striking contrast to the pleasant and congenial surroundings I had always enjoyed in my home in England. (Strange 1920,20)

Esme Tuck, who arrived in Peace River country as a war bride in 1919, wrote:

> My husband unlocked the door of the cabin and we went in . . . I almost gasped at the bareness though we knew what to expect - more or less. . . . The very bareness of the little home made a strange appeal to me and I loved it at once as one does an underprivileged child or a hurt animal. (Tuck 1919)

And Edna Banks, for whom the move to Saskatchewan from her native Ontario was a series of shocks, remembered:

> I stared silently at the small house, sitting so alone, so unprotected in the middle of thousands of acres of snow; without even the protection of a coat of paint and whose only address was a few Roman numerals on a weather beaten iron stake . . . the inside looked lonely too. A cold cook stove stood just inside the door, depressing when you are cold and hungry; I saw an unmade bed over in the corner and our large kitchen table stood along the wall, the chairs were askew about the room . . . (Banks 1911)

No shock would be greater than that of Peggy Holmes who after carrying "a glowing picture of our new home ahead of us" with her on a difficult trip into the bush, found on their arrival that their shack was just a heap of charred ruins, with any useful contents pilfered. For their first night, she and her husband retreated a mile to an abandoned shack, on which a note was tacked: "Have given up the unequal struggle. Help yourself." She wrote that they bedded down that night feeling "very defeated and unhappy" and that she awoke the next morning "bewildered, scared and stiff in every joint".(Holmes 1922,75-76) An inauspicious beginning to her homesteading life!

For some women, the adjustment to the new environment was ameliorated by other concerns, including not worrying relatives at home. "I suppose you are wanting to know what I think of the country here. Well I do not want to always have to live here. I don't like the wind but I think I will be quite happy for a few years" Lillian Turner wrote to her mother.(Turner 1906) And Kaja Froyen, in her inimitable way, felt the adventure in the situation. "It was so romantic and different to me that I enjoyed it" she wrote in her memoirs.(Froyen 1904) Catharine Neil "fondly imagined Grassy Lake would be like Medicine Hat" but later wrote that her "dream was shattered".(Neil 1905) For her, a new bride of a sheep rancher, the biggest disappointment was to find herself living alone for the first days of her married life, for she arrived at sheep shearing time.

As one reads women's accounts of their first impressions of their environment and their living conditions, what emerges is the way in which shattered expectations and dreams must be quickly dealt with, usually quietly by the women themselves, and without discussion. Only in their written accounts, in letters to family and friends, and later in memoirs, do these emotions surface and these feelings dominate their memories. Reasons for this emotional solitude may vary, from cultural norms, to the type of intimate relations men and women were accustomed to sharing. The loneliness this solitude created is the hallmark of this generation's lives as homesteaders.

New skills and challenges

Major life changes are stressful. For women who arrived to homestead on the Canadian prairies, there were two major challenges. One was adapting to a completely foreign and often inhospitable environment, and the second was to learn as quickly as possible the practical skills needed to live there. For young newlyweds there was period of adjustment that was particularly hard on the women. They had to adjust simultaneously to being a married person and all its social consequences and prescriptions, to their new partners, and to homestead life, and its demands for competencies and knowledge which the women usually did not possess upon arrival. There were both positive and negative aspects peculiar to this intersection of circumstances. The spirit of adventure and the excitement they felt as they started a new life with their chosen mates served as real buffers for the hardships and disappointments they endured in the first year of homestead life. At the same time the stresses of adjusting to three major life changes at once - often getting to know their husband for the first time - makes the beginning of homestead life painfully difficult and incredibly lonely. Some women were forthright in describing these challenges:

> Now the novelty had worn off. I had come to realize that life on the frontier was made up of hard labour, a minimum of comfort and a constant battle with the elements. It was a lonely existence, with Walter out of doors early and late, not another shack close enough to send out a cheering ray of light on a long winter evening, and neighbourly visits a rare occasion. Suddenly it seemed to me that I

> had come to the end of my adventuresome trail; the future looked duller and more oppressive than the life I had shed. I was bored, and homesick as well.
> (Margaret Thompson, 1919)

"After a ten mile drive we arrived at the ranch. Then I realized I was alone in a strange country with no neighbours, no stores and little experience in cooking and housekeeping" wrote Catharine Neil in her memoirs.(Neil 1905) Peggy Holmes explained that "being a city girl I was totally ignorant of pioneer life".(Holmes 1921,55) And Monica Hopkins observed that "The new life I had taken on so cheerfully was so different from anything I had ever experienced before . . . nothing had prepared me for the difference in every way that I am finding out here." At first, Hopkins was afraid to stay alone at the house while the men went off haying, but she soon realized "it was a nuisance for everybody" so she decided she was going to stay home to attempt some cooking, the first cooking she had done since her married life began. "I never realized what a lot of preparation there is to a meal", she wrote, "nor the amount of work there is to do after a meal".(Hopkins 1909) And Mary Tennis outlined, as do many women in their accounts, how food and its preparation became such a central part of their new lives and how life has changed:

> I suppose a year or so ago food played no part in my life until it was ready to eat. But now that I'm a farmer's wife I suppose, I suppose I shall always be telling you the joys and woes of a typical farmer's wife. I confess I am surprised, myself, at the interest I take in farm affairs, just as I used to be interested in nursing. . . . Yes, I've learned to do my own baking of bread as well as cakes, pies and cookies. . . . Being a farmer's wife is very intriguing. I'm learning fast, but, no doubt, there are still a lot of things a farmer's wife needs to know, and I'm going to learn them. (Tennis 1926)

And Hilda Kirkland, who found the homestead lifestyle not to her liking, commented in her memoirs "To leave the life of an art student in London for that of a settler's wife on a prairie farm is surely as complete a change as can be imagined."(Kirkland 1895) Several of the new brides, like Hilda, speculated about their new spouse's expectations of them, and worried about their ability to meet the requirements imposed on women in homesteading. "I have still so much to learn but I can't help feeling a little proud of myself that I have come through the first year of my life here without making any very big mistakes, or making Billie ashamed of me. . . . I can't help smiling when I look back and think how absolutely 'green' I was" wrote Monica Hopkins.(Hopkins 1909) Kathleen

Strange was obsessed with "making good" and measuring up to the standards set by the "country women" in her community. (Strange 1920) As Mary Edey pointed out, she didn't know anybody in this country, and "You wouldn't ask strangers things" so "you just toddled along yourself, the best you knew. What you didn't know you learned".(Edey 1914) While to some extent many newly married women all over the world have adjustments to make and new skills to learn, the demands of homesteading put extra pressure on these women. The isolation in which they struggled to learn new skills and meet new expectations robbed them of any support or assistance they might have received as a matter of course in another location. Women also experienced some genuine pride in themselves as they achieved new skills independently. These first challenges gave them a taste of their own capabilities, and the good feelings new competencies brought, and these feelings, over time, became integral to their identity as homestead women.

The environment, both natural and social, posed some serious challenges to women's stamina and spirits. "If one is to get the full enjoyment out of country life, one must quickly come to terms with the weather" observed Esme Tuck.(Tuck 1919) Mrs. Ireland recalled her first summer on the prairie, trying to survive the elements in a tent. "We came in May and had a snowstorm in June. It was a big one too, sagged all the tents a way down. And then we had a hailstorm in August." (Ireland 1910) And describing a trip of fifty miles to the nearest grain elevator, Margaret Thompson wrote "One early morning we started out with two large sleighloads filled to capacity, pulled by eight Clydesdale horses. It was a long trip for me, who had come to the farm from city life. Although we were bundled up like Eskimos, we often had to walk beside our loads to ward off the winter's chill."(Thompson 1920) Some women found the conditions repulsive or frightening. "I remember it was the first time I ever went down to breakfast without washing my face but I could not bring myself to put my sponge into the water basin full of 'wigglies' which had been dipped from a pond nearby" wrote Mary Cummins.(Cummins 1883) Henrietta Campbell, who originally emigrated to Canada from Scotland at the age of ten to become a home help for a Quebec family, described her fears:

> I found life on the farm very hard as I was scared of everything, people, animals, snakes, mice, lizards, thunderstorms, staying alone, etc. But as I was there to do chores, besides helping in every way in the house, I had to milk cows, feed calves, gather eggs no matter how scared I was. (Campbell 1916)

The social environments in which women found themselves were so completely different from the ones they had previously enjoyed. Many women noted the distance to the nearest woman neighbour, but they found themselves for the most part submerged in a male culture, and visiting only with men. It was usually the men who travelled from home to home on a regular basis, and women only occasionally got a chance to visit each other. This was a drastic change for most women from their previous female centred lives, with daily intercourse between friends, family members and servants who were almost exclusively female. It also created a profound sense of loneliness with which the women had to learn to cope. At the same time, unlike the carefully structured social lives from which they had come, these women found themselves entertaining guests at any time, and sometimes many people in one day, usually Sundays. This took some women by surprise and was another new adjustment for them, particularly when they were still learning how to cook and bake and were not prepared for extra diners. "I still shudder when I recall a Sunday early in the summer; almost before I had cut my teeth so you might say. We had twenty-one visitors during the day and there were nineteen of us for supper . . . I still do not know how I managed and only made a pretense at eating myself, and I was hungry" wrote Edna Banks.(Banks 1911) The loneliness many women felt was loneliness in crowd, a need to connect regularly and in meaningful ways to other women.

Perhaps even more difficult was a social environment inhospitable to non-English speaking immigrants. "But still we could not talk the English. We had so much trouble learning. Some of them was really helpful but some of them they just laughed" Magdalena Zeidler explained.(Zeidler 1910) And Mary Unger expressed her belief that the men "could take it easier" but the inability to communicate with neighbours and shopkeepers was very hard on the women and children.(Unger 1924) Marie Rudd found both learning English and starting a farm very difficult and found she could only pick up a "little bit here and a little bit there" of the language but she had to be a competent farmer right away. (Rudd 1927) The prairie census of 1916 reports that about 1 0% of the population over the age of ten was unable to speak English.[5]

Local customs too had to be learned:

> Another thing I remember that first spring . . . I was all alone all day. I looked out and saw a team and buggy coming in on the prairie trail, with a Mounted police in his red coat. We were not familiar with the NWMP in Manitoba, so I was rather alarmed, he produced a paper and asked me to sign it, I hesitated . . . he explained it was a patrol sheet, and he had to get signatures of every place he called. I signed, but worried all day for fear I had signed away the homestead. (Ellen Lowes 1882)

For some women, like Mary Lawrence, the customs of the Indians and the nuances of the various tribal cultures also had to be learned in order to survive on the farm. She too worried about embarrassing her husband with her ignorance. "But I had to get used to lots of things as time went on" wrote Maria Potter (Potter 1884) and she expressed the sentiments shared by so many women in their writings.

Women noted with honesty and with humour the hard work they put into learning the skills required for successful farm and ranch life. For some women, making bread came to symbolize the struggle for competence, and light fluffy bread is a sweet sign of success. For others, their contributions to the construction of farm buildings, to creating a comfortable home in an uncomfortable shack, or demonstrating competence in outside work were more significant. New skills women had never attempted before, but were forced to learn, included harnessing a horse, driving a wagon, taking care of their own children, washing clothes, ironing, sewing and mending, cooking and baking, cutting hair, churning butter, preserving food, papering and painting their homes, milking cows, birthing calves, cleaning barns, building sod structures, midwifery, preparing the dead for burial, selecting and comparing seed heads, and learning to ride a horse.

The most common challenges mentioned were making bread, cooking for large groups and washing clothes. From these women's accounts, we learn that many women who came to the prairies had little cooking experience, and most had never made bread before. It was often the first thing they had to learn to do. "Breadmaking was my first great problem. I got a package of yeast cakes and tried to follow the directions but for many a day had many failures and few successes," remembered Catharine Neil.(Neil 1905) "My first attempt at breadmaking was a dismal failure, the loaves made dandy doorstops,"

wrote Anna Nichol.(Nichol 1915) And Esme Tuck, despite having a good teacher, claimed she felt "humiliated" as she struggled with her bread making:

> Fortunately Spencer knew how to toss off a good loaf as I was not very good at picking up the art. Sad to relate even the hens refused unconditionally to eat the first lot I made. We, of course, could do nothing with it. (Tuck 1919)

Esme Tuck came to the west with only the knowledge of butter-making, and her cooking disasters were quite frequent in her first year on the homestead.

> I couldn't bake bread when I came out here but I had to learn . . . oh I had a lady show me one time as near as I could and my first bread wasn't that hot. It was hard baking bread in those years too because the yeast came in little square packages and you set it overnight. It was awfully hard to keep the bread warm . . . piled blankets on the floor around it. And sometimes as I say at first it wasn't that good but I finally managed it and I got so I could bake really good bread because you got lots of practice. You kept at it.(Mary Edey 1914)

Like Mary Edey, the women improved their breadmaking with practice, despite difficult working conditions:

> The baking of bread was a nightmare as I did not know how, but after a few hard tacks got a little better and the worst of it was hanging on to the stovepipes from blowing away while trying to bake it . . . .(Margaret Smith 1906)

> I was trying to master the art of breadmaking that spring for it was not the easy process that it is today. The old fashioned yeast cakes that were used at that time were sensitive to chills, and an even temperature was hard to maintain in our house and the end result was unpredictable.(Edna Banks 1911)

Cooking for a large group seemed to be the second most daunting task, after bread baking had been mastered. Mary Lawrence and several others had large groups of men and children to feed on a daily basis, year round, while other women faced this challenge for a short intensive period at threshing time. "I often wondered the first time I did it, I'd never seen a gang of threshers. Not only done anything for them, I'd never seen them in

my life. And there was 19 men there" Beatrice Whitehair explained.(Whitehair 1915) And Sarah Roberts also felt unequal to the task of feeding a threshing gang:

> The threshers came early in October. it was my first experience with them and I had been dreading it for days. . . . I was almost in a panic. I finally decided that I would give them plenty of good food, but would not compete with the other women around in a line of work in which I did not excel.(Roberts 1907, 226)

Mary Lawrence found herself adapting old skills to new conditions:

> The immediate task of cooking was far heavier than I anticipated. It had never occurred to me how much a crowd of strapping outdoor men could eat. I had been used to the delicate appetites of the town or city. . . . Slowly I learned to lug up whole pails of vegetables from the cellar, just for one meal, and cook 10 to 20 pound roasts instead of the meagre 4 and 5 pounders I had been taught to cook, and this daily . . . [baking bread] It had been hard to get started at first. I didn't know the ways of the North and expected to have yeast to use, as formerly; instead I learned how to save some dough from one baking to the next and use this "sourdough" to start a fresh batch. Lawrence 1898,40)

Washing clothes was another new skill that homestead women mentioned as an early challenge. Monica Hopkins admitted she had never washed clothes in her life, and had to rely on her husband to teach her how. Many women were stumped about how to get clothes clean given the conditions and supplies they had to wash them. They were eager to exchange hints with other women, but the opportunities for this were few. Edith Lawry described her first wash day:

> This day I was going to wash. There was no well, the water had to be taken down from the creek. So he left me with a big supply. I thought it was enough. However I had to get more . . . I had worn it [her hair] in two braids wound around your head. I had never used a scrub and a washboard in my life until I came out here. And this day I was scrubbing away and I was hot and tired and bad tempered and I guess with the heat and the blessed braids kept slipping down . . . I went in the house and got the scissors and cut them right off. . . . That was the first bobbed hair out here.(Lawry 1919)

"It seemed to take a lot of shaking down, to settle into a new life" Edna Banks observed.(Banks 1911) In a sense it was like starting all over again, as old skills and knowledge had to be set aside and new skills developed in areas of endeavour quite

foreign to many of the women and in conditions never experienced before. Mastery of these tasks became integral parts of their new identities:

> At first the novelty was pleasing, and it interested me to see how many different things I could learn to turn my hand. . . . in my ignorance I thought I could accomplish everything. I certainly think that, given average intelligence, with the driving power of necessity behind it, most things can be accomplished! Within a year of my marriage I . . . had learnt to bake and churn, cook passably, to wash and iron, paint and paper my house, and cut my husband's hair! . . . many failures there were of course, tragic at the time, but humorous in perspective. (Hilda Kirkland 1895)

> Both my husband and I were brought up on farms before venturing to this Western land. We both thought we knew something of farm life. How little that was to our advantage here we soon found out. Mine was the easier task. I had only to learn how to work without proper or what I used to think proper equipment, and to find out by experience that necessity is the mother of invention. . . . We just had to go along at first by "sheer strength and awkwardness"- invent what we would with whatever means were at hand and patiently work out results. (Harriet Neville,1882-1905,40)

In addition to a real feeling of accomplishment, many women found that learning new skills involved overcoming significant fears. For Catharine Neil, driving the wagon alone for the first time was terrifying. For Mrs. Wilson, her fear of horses had to be overcome to enable her to ride around the countryside unaccompanied; and for many women, being left alone on the prairie for days, in sole charge of the farm and its work, was always a fearful time. For most women, this requirement in particular seemed to go against all that they had understood and experienced as females in a culture that defined femininity in terms of protection by and dependence on men. The satisfaction women felt as they produced their first tub of butter, filled their first cans of fruit, built their first sod hut, and learned to milk the cow efficiently was very real. The apprenticeship period on the homestead was full of large adjustments and small victories, of learning new expectations and the skills to meet them, and of forging new identities.

New identities

A common feature of many of the women's writings is a recognition that they assumed new identities through the process of migration, settling and learning homesteading skills. Equally important to some was the new identity they gained as newly married persons, the change in status being a significant passage for an adult woman as she assumed new responsibilities and new tasks which she had often never done before. Her purpose in life suddenly became the maintenance of a husband, a household and for some, eventually a family. For most women, it was the intersection of marriage and its responsibilities with the process of migration and demands of homestead life that turned their worlds upside down. Everything they knew and understood about themselves and the world was challenged.

Monica Hopkins wrote a comment in her memoirs which highlights three characteristics of identity development for women new to the prairie farm or ranch wife occupation: being defined by your husband's needs, interests and status; the need to maintain a cheerful outlook for others' sake, and the effort it takes to be happy.

> By now I realize that this is essentially a man's country and that a woman has practically to sink her own identity and take on her husband's interests. For a woman to come out here, and by "here" I mean isolated spots such as this, and not like country life would be fatal . . . interest in her husband's pursuits is absolutely necessary. . . it is useless grousing over the inevitable, so many unexpected things turn up you might as well meet them with a smile . . . If you treat life as a joke and not take it too seriously, you'll be happy. (Hopkins 1909)

Sarah Sundberg wrote in a recent article that studies of farm women's writings "demonstrate that economic necessity and cultural prescriptions for prairie women's lives combined to demand that women be strong, helpful, enduring and married. Not surprisingly then, tasks connected with the care and support of families shaped their lives."[6] The cultural prescriptions for womanhood that thrived on the prairies at the turn of the century had deep roots in the nineteenth century domestic piety movement. As Barbara Welter writes in her description of the 'cult of true womanhood' that developed during the nineteenth century "A wife who submerged her own talents to work for her husband was extolled as an example of a true woman."[7] For many of the women who

migrated to the prairies to set up households, the surrender of their talents and interests to the demands of the farm or ranch was done out of necessity as well as in response to social norms. For some it was a welcome change from the lives they had been living and offered new opportunities to use their skills and talents. But what the homestead required women to do always came first; self-fulfilment had to be found in the things that must be done, rather than the activities one may wish to do. There simply was no other way to live that would enable the family to survive. While this all-consuming partnership was welcomed by some, others found it a huge adjustment, and on the twentieth century frontiers of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the great clash of new and old ideologies about womanhood can be seen in the lives of homesteading women. Here we see some of the new professional women and educated women of the twentieth century trying to set aside their personal freedoms and interests, to redefine their sense of themselves as accomplished and independent individuals in new and unfamiliar ways, to serve the domestic needs and labour demands of a farm operation. And moreover, the training they had received from their mothers about ideal womanhood prescribed that this sacrifice be done with a smile - above all, they must be cheerful about their duties and comforting to others. Tributes to pioneer women on the prairies reiterate these expectations over and over, and many, like this one, are found in the hundreds of local histories written in both provinces: "But though their faces were tanned, and their hands calloused and work-stained, they had a loving look and tender touch for all who were in need." [8]

Some women, in adjusting to this new image of themselves, compared themselves to the "housemaids at home." Some noted the pretty clothes from their former lives that remained in the bottom of their trunks. Peggy Holmes wrote about how "life on the homestead is really toughening me." (Holmes 1921,60)

That it was a long and difficult transformation for some cannot be denied. Kathleen Strange wrote six months after her arrival:

> For the first time since leaving home and loved ones I felt happy myself. After all, I had now established a home of my own. . . . Even if this was not the place I wanted to be, even if I was still unsettled, still feeling a little bit like a fish out of water, at least the worst of the rough edges had now been worn off and the future promised a little smoother sailing. (Strange 1920,139)

And Monica Hopkins admitted "I am getting into the way of things now but at first I found it rather difficult. . . . I was always forgetting that it was I who had to get up from the table, collect the china and dishes and then wash them up". (Hopkins 1909)

For some young women who arrived in the 1880's, the small numbers of women in prairie society created a unique identity crisis. Men did not know how to treat single women who were so rarely in their company. Mary Inderwick is affronted by the stares of men at a hotel dining room, where she is outnumbered by men forty-five to two, and equally disgusted with her introduction to a young gentleman as one "of the girls".(Inderwick 1884) Suddenly the respect and propriety that surrounded her in her life before had been stripped away, and she found herself a curiosity. Some of these young single women, struggled with how to handle their new independence, in a society free of many of the constraints and customs of the communities and families from which they had come. Both the diaries of Sophie Miles and of Mary Inderwick show that courting behaviour was an area in which tradition and prairie culture occasionally clashed, and young women had to negotiate their ways alone through unfamiliar and unpredictable social situations.

The challenge of the prairie environment and also its appeal to some was its stark difference from the places in which women had grown up. Kathleen Strange wrote about shedding her English snobbishness and class consciousness to appreciate people in a new way, "that it's what people are, not what they do, that matters".(Strange 1920) And both Hilda Kirkland and Clarissa Althouse appreciated the changes in their own points of view:

> As change of environment brings about, insensibly, change of ideas, I found my views readjusting themselves, and my sense of proportion rearranging things, so that what had hitherto seemed of vital importance no longer appeared to matter; things artificial and conventional had no place in the pioneer's life, where all was simple and real. (Kirkland 1895)

> This country certainly gets us away from all conventions and narrow ways of the past. It broadens our ideas, and is a real education to meet and talk with people from other countries. It is next to travelling to those places. There are many drawbacks here, but when one compares the life here with other places we have much to be thankful for. For one thing we are never out of work.
> (Althouse 1907))

Along with the opportunities for broadening one's outlook, and growing through learning new skills and ways of life, came restrictions imposed by the requirements of the farm, and by the conventions about women's behaviour that the couple carried with them. "Beauty and usefulness"[9] were the dual feminine function formulated in the nineteenth century, and this prescription found a variety of new expressions on the prairies. Women were expected to maintain their clean and graceful appearance while shovelling manure or rounding up cows; to create an attractive home out of a rude cabin that leaked mud and water when it rained; and to instantly produce substantial meals from meagre supplies while being a gracious and entertaining host. Above all, it was important to them as well as to their husbands that they not change their personal standards, their appearance, their acculturated femininity, while everything about them had completely changed. They were simply to learn more ways to be useful, because the economics of farming or ranching demanded it.

The juncture of being transplanted to a prairie homestead and being newly married created an identity crisis for many of the women whose accounts make up this study. This was not the life they had planned for themselves, nor the one they had even imagined as they made their commitment to their future husbands. The pressure to respond immediately to the rigours and tasks of homestead life forced many to put some of their own needs, interests and aspirations aside, and to redefine themselves and their lives according to these new demands and to the strange new place in which they found themselves. In doing so, many women found their needs and aspirations changing too, and some remarked on this with surprise. For women who were already married, the homestead presented a new challenge to their understanding of and their capabilities in the roles of wife, mother and housekeeper. For some of these women, the adjustments were more painful, the apprenticeship more difficult, as they suffered for what they had left behind and agonized over what was missing for themselves and their children in this new environment.

Figure I: Location of Homesteads in Alberta

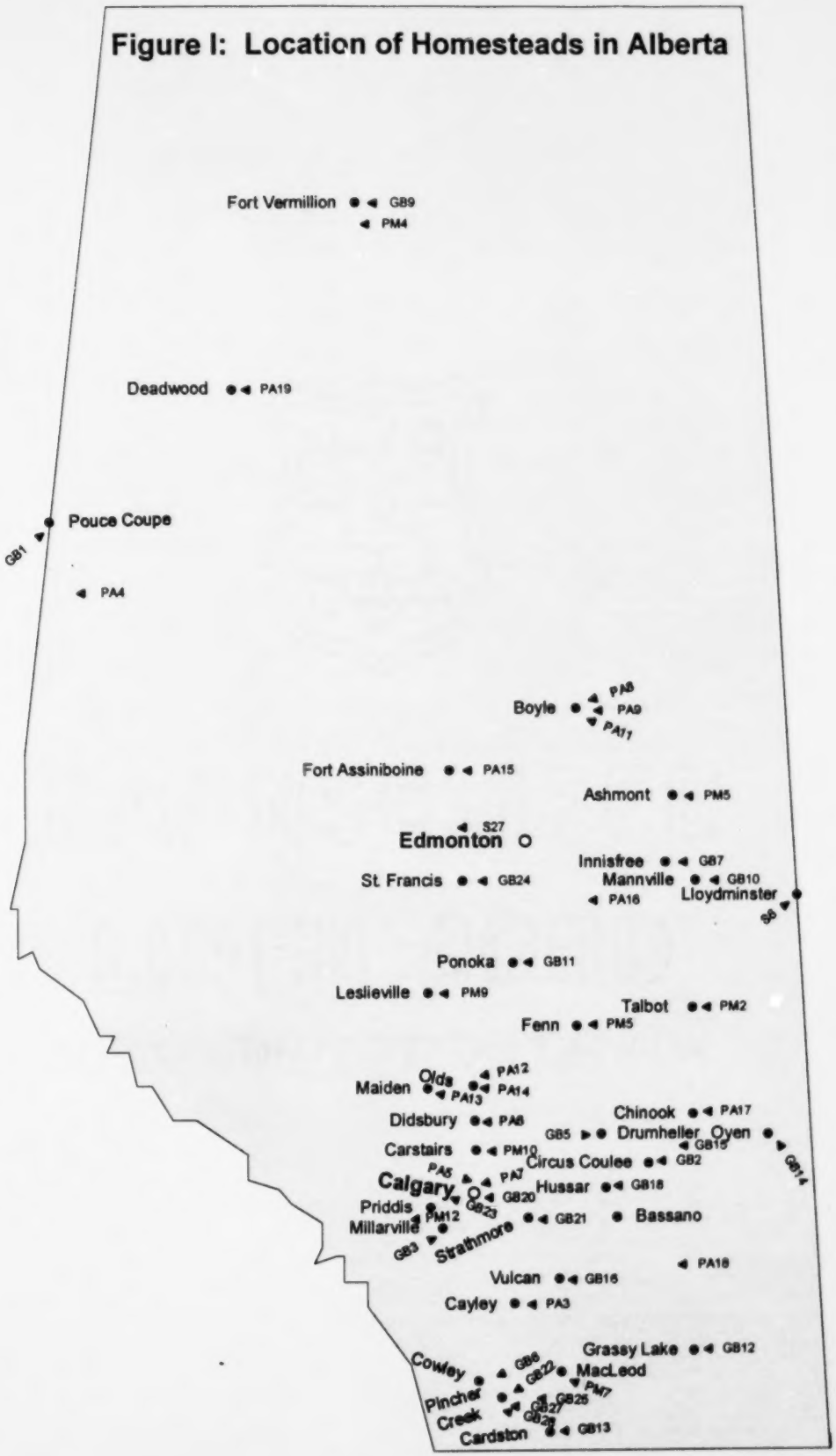

Figure II: Location of Homesteads in Saskatchewan

Chapter Three: Daily Life and Labour

> A farm is a slave-driver.
>
> Irene Parlby

> There was no pomp or clangour of battle to sustain their spirit; it was drudgery, constant, sordid and demeaning.
>
> Marie Albina Hamilton

Time and place

Homesteading was for everyone a step backwards in time. Women and men found themselves living and working in ways more akin to eighteenth century European peasants than to turn-of-the twentieth century modern citizens. This for the most part was dictated by the place in which they found themselves: for many, nothing but a piece of land that had never seen a plow, far removed from the conveniences of a town or the assistance of an established neighbour.

While there were some key differences between the Canadian prairies during the settlement years and Europe in the 18th century, the availability of tools and manufactured goods being the most important one, it is astounding how little women's lives differ in both these agricultural cultures. The seasonality of their work lives, the daily pattern of their labours, the double workload prescribed for their sex, and the accommodation of childbearing and child rearing remain as constants for centuries and found new expression in the settlement years in Alberta and Saskatchewan.[1]

Time and place explain the differences between women's settlement experiences: how ranch life differed from grain and mixed farming; how 1880's settlement challenges differed from the 1920's; how the northern settlement experience was different from that in the south and central areas of both provinces. Yet again, despite the variations time and locations effect, women's work and women's lives were remarkably alike.

Time and place also describe the approach women took to their situation. They understood their place in time, the temporary nature of their struggle is a common theme,

and so was the belief in the rewards that passage of time would bring to the family in return for their labours. They also had an acute sense of place, as most disolaced persons do, and that it was the place that held them to their tasks and defined the nature of those tasks. There was a need to have a place and to hold on to it; the place itself was their only future security. (That for many this was a false security will be discussed in chapter five.) And time was a precious commodity in lives filled with more work to do than time allowed. Mabel Hawthorne wrote that their busy lives "didn't leave much time for dreaming and yet the dreams were there, engrossed in our homes, we accepted all that went with it. But always dreaming of better days to come."(Hawthorne 1906-1918)

The constant and enormous workload that homesteading involved for both men and women was the subject of many personal accounts. Work defined their lives. Some women found it overwhelming or depressing, while others were invigorated by it. The infrequency and specialness of leisure and entertainment activities were almost always described in relation to this daunting and ever-present workload. Mary Lawrence wrote in her memoirs "we did not often go sailing on the river. The pressure of work stood taskmaster over pleasure, but our delight was the greater for the interlude being stolen."(Lawrence 1898-1907) And Mary Lubchyk recalled that when she and her husband first started homesteading she had to "work like a man" and "there was no time for children - no time to make children, because there was too much work to be done".(Lubchyk 1925) And years later, with a rosy glow that memoirs sometimes hold, Monica Hopkins described a busy work period in her life:

> The last few weeks have simply flown. I couldn't keep up with them at all. I staggered along in the rear trying to do my spring cleaning, looking after my setting hens, helping Billie at times, churning every week, putting in the garden with Billie, and a dozen other odd things that kept me busy all day long. I fell into bed every night tired but happy, slept like a top and woke up next morning to start another day which would be full of interest. Billie is just as busy so at least we have no time to be bored with each other or with our way of life. (Hopkins 1909-1911)

Sarah Roberts explained in her memoirs that work interfered with her intention to write "at various times of the experiences the years brought. I think the chief reason for my not doing it was the fact that the press of work became so heavy that I had neither the time

nor the energy for writing."(Roberts 1915,101) Kathleen Strange shared her opinion of the workload of farm women:

> No one, to my mind, works harder than a farm woman, not even the farmer himself . . . it seemed to me I was on my feet practically every minute of every day - from five in the morning till nine or ten at night.(Strange, 1920,43)

Peggy Holmes was forthright in expressing her views about the labour of homesteading:

> Our chores were endless. . . . We had no time for social life at all. . . . Why does everything have to be done in such a hard way I pondered. . . . Our hearts were strong even if our backs were breaking. But the clarion call of work was ever in our ears. We rose early as the days never seemed long enough. (Holmes 1922)

"The price of survival was constant vigilance" wrote Esme Tuck.(Tuck 1920) She described her early life on the homestead:

> Early and late, rain or shine, we worked to improve and prove up our homestead. The long summer days were hardly long enough for all we planned to do in them. We were extraordinarily contented, for our work was also our pleasure. . . . I often wonder why we worked so hard, for the rewards were so pitifully small. In fact most of what we earned went to equip the farm. (Tuck 1920)

"There is so much to do to begin these places out here that even rest on Sunday seems an impossibility" wrote Barbara Slater to a distant friend.(Slater 1911) The whole concept of how life should be conducted as women understood it from their lives before, was challenged and altered by the irrepressible demands of the work required to survive.

Some women did find their work pleasurable, as the dreams in their heads motivated them to push through the daily routines of hard physical work. Mary Tennis is one of the few who expressed delight at her new work activities, claiming that she didn't realize that her former occupation, as a nurse, had lost its appeal to her until she had "her own home and interests there".(Tennis 1922) She was, however, fortunate to have had hired help to assist with her household work, and she was one of the few women in this group who did no work outside the home. Most of the women in this position, who worked only on household tasks, still did an enormous amount of work on a daily basis. "The business of housework was pretty much hard routine without alleviation " writes Mary Lawrence as she

cooked for a household of a dozen or more adults on a daily basis.(Lawrence 1898-1907) Cooking included the production of food, including churning butter, making bread, preserving fruits, vegetables and meat, and endless baking. For most women, the enjoyment they experienced in their work came from being outdoors, from the satisfaction of being busy and productive, and from the belief they were creating a better life for their children.

Both the type and amount of work performed by women varied according to the type of operation, and by both the location and time of settlement. Marie Albina Hamilton described quite graphically the difference between farm and ranch life. She wrote that ranch life involved "little of the drudgery of life on the wheat farms that seemed so soon to stamp out the youth and brightness in many of the pioneer women".[2] Her analysis shows that both in terms of location and amenities and the work that women were required to do, ranch life was much preferred. For the most part ranching women were more likely to do only household chores and gardening, which allowed them some free time during the day to spend as they chose. And the more pleasant locations of ranches, according to Hamilton, meant less toil in keeping things clean. The lives of Helen Millar, Amelia Lucas, Mary Inderwick, Mary Russell and Evelyn Springett confirm these beliefs, as they were for the most part free from ranch work to work at other tasks: housework, running a post office, educating children, operating a store, keeping ranch records, driving for parts and supplies, growing flowers and vegetables. Helen Millar did look after sick livestock, particularly the lambs, and occasionally fed livestock as well. Other ranching women also worked with livestock, although this work was often seasonal and sporadic in nature.

There were significant differences between homesteading on bush land, most of it in the northern parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan, and on the open prairie. The northern frontiers were harder to access, travel was more difficult, and the preparation of the land for farming was harder and slower work. Esme Tuck described how she cleared their land in Peace River country with a tomahawk, and because they had no horses, made a team with her sister, and hauled the logs in by a rope over their shoulders. Women found the need for self-sufficiency even greater on the northern frontiers. Fewer goods were

available, distances more difficult to overcome and winters longer and colder. Resourcefulness was required to produce and gather food and other supplies like candles, soap, and warm clothing. Snow had to be melted for water. Northern women such as Mary Lawrence, Hilda Rose and Peggy Holmes described that cabin fever, loneliness, boredom and dangerously cold temperatures provided unique challenges for a significant part of the year.

Time of settlement made a difference in several ways. The increased availability of some foods and manufactured goods at neighbouring towns was a notable change brought by advanced settlement that had profound effects on the work of women. More established communities also meant a bigger market for home produced goods such as butter, eggs, poultry, sewing, jams and jellies, fruit and vegetables. Women often increased their production of these commodities to meet the new demands. The expansion of railway systems, bringing rail service closer to more farmers and ranchers, made it easier to take products to market and to import needed goods. It also improved access to medical services available in larger centres, relieving women of some of their nursing and midwifery responsibilities. A more settled community also increased the possibility of hiring additional workers, either for the farm chores or the household. The longer the family had been farming, the more likely it was that they could afford to hire outside help.

The sheer volume of work involved in some of the tasks women undertook is staggering. The once a year feeding of threshing gangs is well known as a huge undertaking. Women write with vivid memories of the threshing crew's enormous appetites and the huge quantities of food which had to be prepared. Women would often single-handedly cook for as many as twenty-five men, for periods ranging between three days and three weeks.

> And do you know you baked bread and you got all the bread made and every day you had to make buns or something and a cake. And I'd make pies and pies would disappear. . . . Well you just worked. And you had to have a certain amount of knowledge just to keep yourself going, you know what I mean? Because you had to have breakfast enough by six. And you had to have porridge and you had to have fried potatoes. So you were always doing potatoes. They liked that and they wanted bacon and eggs. And a loaf of bread wouldn't go anywhere. . . . Well you'd do a baking of bread and it would be gone before you could sneeze you might say. They had enormous

appetites. . . . at the same time I had to look after cows, chickens and children . . . I didn't have time to eat. And I didn't want to eat. I was too buoyed up to eat. And I'd fall on the bed at night just dead . . . oh you'd have to be up at five, . . . you see it wasn't any electric. It was wood and coal. So we had to keep the wood box going. . . . I did have one little girl. But I did her father's session as well. I served my own at half past eleven and I served them at half past twelve. So you can imagine what it was like to keep that one going.
(Beatrice Whitehair 1915-)

. . . had the gang here for five days and then I helped with the cooking at other places for a week so know something of cooking for thresher's appetites! I made 36 loaves, big ones, and that wasn't enough, the joints of meat too much as one could handle. I hope it will be a long year before we have them again. (Barbara Slater 1912)

Jubilantly my husband said, "The crew will be here today!" As if I didn't know! . . . I had baked 20 loaves of bread, cakes, cookies and pies. We had pickles [sic] in the cellar, and all the home-butchered beef, pork, bacon and sausage meat stored in the rootcellar.
(Margaret Thompson 1920)

The most eagerly awaited and yet in some respects the most dreaded time of year was that spent while waiting for the threshers to come and go . . . the unfortunate housewife had to be poised ready to start at the word 'go'. . . . What a bustle! Jugs of hot coffee, buns and sandwiches in prodigious quantities to be taken out for lunches. Dinner to be ready not when the housewife had planned it, but when the threshers decided they would like it. Lunch again at 3:00 pm. Then supper which consisted of the remains of dinner, if any, with extras thrown in for good measure and to liven up the meal. And, oh, the washing up and washing up and washing up. if there was ever a spare moment during the meal, one went to the wash dish and got a few strokes in. . . . The most dreaded sound of all was the 'pop, pop, pop' of the poor tired old engine as it petered out. I listened so eagerly for it to start again for it might mean all the gang to feed for another day, as well as all the horses. (Esme Tuck 1919-)

Like Barbara Slater, most women declared the annual arrival of the threshers a ritual they preferred to live without. Several expressed how they welcomed with great relief the arrival of machines which eliminated the need for threshing crews, and when the large scale catering came to an end. There was no one point at which this happened, for farm machinery could only be bought or rented if there was enough cash to do so. Economic

historians report a very uneven adoption of farm machinery over the prairies, with most families unable to purchase labour saving devices until well into the 1920's.[3] Many women could not recall the exact year that this transition took place on their farm, the memory of those years of cooking for threshing gangs is a more powerful one. What they remembered best are the feelings of relief and feelings that the change did not come soon enough.

The production of food for the family, for hired help and for market was a year round activity of significant proportions. It was often the only source of income, or the best source of income, that enabled the family to stay on the homestead. Eliza Wilson fed five adults every day on her ranch, and records that she sold seventy pounds of butter. Marie Rudd states that they had twenty cows on their farm and one hundred chickens, and that they sold their eggs and cream. In addition to being responsible for the cows and chickens, she cooked for her brother, daughter and husband, and for eight Norwegian boys her husband brought from Norway to learn farming. Harriet Neville produced big pots of jam from fruit she and her children gathered, to sell to the railway to feed their workers. This money bought good lumber to finish the house and the woodshed. She and her husband grew vegetables for cash to survive their first few years on the farm:

> Our garden was really our first source of profit. Time and strength were not measurable in money's worth, and garden work did not demand expensive tools . . . perhaps it is hard to believe but we made more profit from that venture than from any load of wheat before sold in Regina. . . . We had twenty miles to drive, part of the time over no roads, but cultivated patience and perseverance along with our garden. The work was interesting and pleasurable. . . . These things did not grow without work. . . . My hens also brought some profit and much comfort. I had good sale for eggs and when I could raise more poultry had some of those for sale. (Neville 1882-1905)

The production of butter and eggs for sale was a common activity for farm women, and to a lesser extent, for ranchers. Ellen Lowes reported making one hundred and fifty pounds of butter for sale, and Mrs. Joseph Donaldson shipped sixty pounds of butter in one load to Calgary, for which she received seventy three dollars.

Alice Rendell wrote in a letter "we have quite a homeful at present, mustering fifteen in all, which is a big family to cater and cook for." (Rendell 1903) Many women had hired hands, sometimes as many as seven, and also relatives or visitors to cook for in addition to their own husbands and children. Ranching operations which required more than seven men usually also had a cook hired to prepare their meals. An enormous amount of preparations, performed on a year round basis, went into maintaining a well stocked pantry. Esme Tuck described the most typical high volume work activity common to all prairie farm and ranch women:

> By ceaseless canning at all times of the year, I managed to have a good stock of sealers stored away in the cellar, so unexpected guests presented no great housekeeping problem. Moose, deer, pork, beef, chicken and every obtainable line of wild fruit and vegetables were stored on my shelves. A nice feeling. All that was needed was a little time. (Tuck 1919-)

Time was, of course, the essential commodity, and there never seemed to be enough of it for most women. But we are fortunate that women did record how much time some of their tasks took, so we have a fuller appreciation of the nature of their work. Amelia Lucas wrote in her diary that it took half a day to make brine and pack a barrel of corned beef. A morning's work for Barbara Slater included churning nine pounds of butter, scrubbing the sitting room, making two meals, cleaning bedrooms, doing the dishes and the dairy work. Mrs. Joseph Donaldson recorded that it took her three hours to churn eight and a half pounds of butter. Helen Millar picked sixteen and a half pounds of raspberries in a morning. Mabel Leland made forty two pounds of butter in one week, while Mabel Barker remembered that she produced forty pounds of butter each week.

Besides food production, washing, ironing, mending and sewing would often be tasks that grew into high volume activities, both in frequency and amount of work involved in each undertaking. Lillian Turner wrote to her mother "I washed clothes yesterday and it took me from six in the morning until four in the afternoon as hard as I could work to get it out, so you will know it was a big one."(Turner 1906) Kathleen Strange described a typical wash day on her farm:

> Washing! What a job that always was. Usually it took me the entire day . . . the boiling sudsy water had to be carried in pails from the stove to wherever my tubs were set. More than once I burned myself severely, spilling water on unprotected arms and legs. I washed for the hired men as well as for my own

> family. We were always from eight to fifteen strong, according to the time of year . . . there was always an astonishing pile of extremely dirty clothing . . . not to speak of voluminous bed linen . . . (Strange 1920-,220)

Monica Hopkins is unusual among this group of women in that she had both a washing machine and a husband who helped her do the washing (which perhaps explains why he was willing to purchase the machine). Only one other washing machine is mentioned in these accounts; most of the women used scrub boards. All of them have to haul and heat the water on the stove, and in winter this meant melting snow into water first. Women also made their own laundry soap. Some women, usually ranchers, could afford to hire someone to do their wash, often a neighbour. The usual payment was a dollar per wash.

Irons also had to be heated on the stove. Jennie McLean, who kept house for herself, her father and brother, wrote in her diary "started to iron at 9:00 am. and did not finish till 6:00 pm. I was pretty tired but happy to think that it was all clean".(McLean 1908) Maria Szmyrko, like many of the women, spent her winter nights sewing clothes for her children, "their underclothes and their pants and everything."(Szmyrko 1930-) Much of the sewing was done by hand, although several of the women were fortunate enough to own a sewing machine. Helen Millar made all the family's clothes, and records spending several days in a row doing nothing but sewing. Harriett Neville skinned furs and fashioned garments out of them, at first only for her family and later for profit. Women also knitted winter wear for their children and husbands and did mending and "making over" of clothing on a regular basis. Mabel Barker stated "in the wintertime we used to do our own sewing, because we made all our own clothes . . . I did my sewing after I got the children off to bed at midnight."(Barker 1912-) Catharine Neil also found time to make toys for her children. "Much of my mending and making of clothes was done when everyone was in bed and it was then that I made all the play toys for my children."(Neil 1905-)

The contrast between the winter lifestyle and the bustle of activity in spring, summer and fall is evident in women's writings. Many women found the winters long and boring, as their outside chores and pastimes are for the most part, curtailed. It was a time for sleeping longer in the mornings, and doing lots of reading and sewing. "We hardly know

how to put our time in. Get up in the morning at eight or half past. . . . Do chores, have breakfast, dinner about 2pm., dark at four, chores after dark, supper at seven, to bed at 8:00 pm. and every day goes off about the same way" Lillian Turner wrote in a letter to her mother.(Turner 1906-1908) Confinement to the house in winter made life rather dull. "The deep snows and cold came. Life became routine, the men working in the woods and Babe and I taking care of the children and doing the housework" Elone Stobaugh wrote.(Stobaugh 1929) But with the coming of winter, all tasks became more difficult in houses which were hard to keep warm:

> Every household was completely independent, doing all its own work; we baked our own bread, made our own butter, washed and ironed, made our own clothes, in addition to all the ordinary work of an average household; and in winter all these things were rendered doubly hard by the cold. If the dough was chilled the bread was heavy; if the cream was touched ever so lightly by frost, the butter refused to come. The washing was the greatest difficulty of all, for nothing could be dried out of doors. Incredible as it may sound I have seen the sleeve of a shirt broken off by a horse knocking against it as it hung stiffly frozen on a clothes line. (Hilda Kirkland 1895-1905)

Variety and routine describe the key differences between the work that men did and the work that women did on prairie farms and ranches. Women performed a greater variety of tasks than men did, both in a day and seasonally, and women had a more consistent routine to their lives than men did. The requirement to provide three meals a day, and often during heavy work seasons, light lunches between meals, meant that a woman's work rhythms were set by the regularity of feeding times, both human and animal. Men's work varied each day, and season by season, and the pace was set by what was physically possible to achieve, not by meal times. The man farmer did not stop his stooking to go in and make supper, as a woman must. I found one exception to this clear sex-specific difference between men's and women's work patterns in the story shared by Mary Dawes:

> Oh we used to get tired but we used to be up at five in the morning and we used to go to twelve at night and when it was time to go in and get supper ready my husband used to say take it easy, rest a bit, I'll run in and get the kettle on. And he had a half a mile to go to the house to get the kettle on. By the time I got in the kettle was on and the supper was on and all we had to do was sit down and eat. He was a wonderful man. (Dawes 1922-)

Hilda Kirkland wrote about the tediousness of the routine that was women's lives on the homestead, and compares it to men's relative freedom from tedium:

> Men in the colonies, even more noticeably than elsewhere, have much the best of it! Their work is varied, and they live out of doors; they have sports and games from time to time, and splendid shooting in spring and autumn. During the short working months the work is hard, but they like it, and in the long winter they have much leisure. Truly the old adage "Man works from sun to sun but woman's work is never done", was exemplified out here. Winter and summer, day in day out, with scarcely a break in the monotony, we women worked on. (Kirkland 1895-1905)

An area of work activity often overlooked, but critical to the survival of the family, was that of documentation and communication. In most families, it was the women who maintained communication with the families and friends who lived elsewhere. This was not just a social nicety, performed for entertainment reasons. These communiques were essential exchanges of information and advice, and often a way to solicit needed goods.(Chapter four contains more discussion of this aspect of homestead life.) Equally important was the bookkeeping and record keeping activities of the family business. In many cases, the women undertook this task, partly because of their almost constant presence on the farm or ranch, and sometimes because they were more educated than their husbands. The size of the recording and bookkeeping tasks varied greatly. Helen Millar spent a great deal of time keeping track of livestock, including births, deaths, prices and sales; of barter exchanges between ranchers, goods bought and sold, and the hours and dates of the work performed by hired men. Millar also ran the post office and a store out of her home and maintained their records as well. Inventories were also kept by women farmers and ranchers, as well as records of butter churned and sold, eggs produced and sold, and washing services that were purchased, either from the family or for the family. Mary Russell recorded every household and farm expenditure, the hours of work provided by hired help, the numbers of eggs gathered each month and the sales of butter and livestock. Personal diaries that recorded the family's daily activities might also have daily entries about livestock or other goods purchased or exchanged mixed in with the social news and emotional commentary. More commonly, the back pages of a bound diary or a separate accounts book would hold the lists of dates and goods or animals that represented the commercial life of the farm family. A significant number of these were

maintained by the women of homesteading families. Some men also kept diaries, both for business and personal reasons. In their absences from the farm or ranch, their wives often entered the essential information about money and goods exchanges. The need to keep records was dependent on the size and complexity of the farm or ranch operation. However, the daily record was not a frivolous task, and women found time to ensure that it was done.

Another important difference between men and women's work appeared over several decades. As new technology in the form of tractors and other mechanized work aids became available, farmers adopted them as soon as they could afford them. But the adoption of new technologies to assist with household chores was very slow in comparison. These new conveniences included indoor plumbing, washing machines, and electric lighting. If the farm could afford only one generator, it was used for farm operations, not the household. Sarah Sundberg uses the Manitoba survey of farm women, conducted in 1922, to demonstrate that frontier conditions in women's work persisted well beyond the early settlement years.[4] Kathleen Strange, who farmed in the post world war one years, wrote in her memoirs "No one, to my mind, works harder than a farm woman, not even the farmer himself. Usually too she has no conveniences, and not even the mechanical aids her husband has to make his work lighter in the fields."(Strange 1920-,43) There are stories, shared by farm women today, of farm households that did not have indoor plumbing until the late 1960's.[5]

The lack of household conveniences and even some of the basic products such as soap created an additional work burden, mostly shouldered by women. The work required to make the tools for work took considerable time and energy. Isolation from trading centres and neighbours required each household to be self sufficient, and this self sufficiency extended particularly to the goods and services manufactured by the woman for the safety and comfort of her family. "We worked so hard because we had to get these things to save the work. The work was caused by not having them, and that's what forced us to work so hard" explained Mary McCheane.(McCheane 1907-)

The lack of a good water supply made women's work harder. "We never had good drinking water on our farm and it always had to be hauled, which was always a big chore. When the snow came I always melted snow for washing clothes, scrubbing, etc. in spring I used slough water until it would get low or unusable" Henrietta Campbell wrote in her memoirs.(Campbell 1916-) Mary Edey shared her experiences with frontier conditions: "And you'd have to haul water. And everything was the hard way. Melt snow all winter, everything was terribly hard. No bathrooms, no electric lights. Carry the water in, carry the water out." (Edey 1914-) Lillian Beynon declared in a speech to the Saskatchewan Homemakers Club Convention in 1911:

> Women are much too scarce in this western country for us to be able to afford to wear them out over the wash tub and churn when an engine can be purchased at a very reasonable price to do the work quite as well.

As these woman's stories tell us, women were largely responsible for household maintenance, clothing and feeding family members and hired help, and for childcare. Descriptions of the apprenticeship and adjustment period of their lives, when they first arrived on the homestead, reveal that many men knew how to do many of the cooking and household chores better than their wives and in fact taught their wives the techniques of baking bread, building fires and using the stove, washing clothes, and many other household skills. The minute a women stepped on her homestead it was assumed that these should be her tasks and the husband's last responsibilities in these areas were to teach his wife what he knew about them. Very soon they were gender specific tasks, specific to the female adult of the household or female children when they were able, and very rarely carried out by men except perhaps during a woman's confinement in childbirth or serious illness, or of course, her absence from the homestead, which in most cases was a rare occurrence. There is something very peculiar about this sex specific assignment of labour. The person most talented at or suited to a particular task was not always the one performing it. Also, if given a choice, many women make it clear they would have willingly given up the rigours of producing, gathering and cooking food for the household as a regular chore. Many women in fact felt that it was a more demanding and difficult chore than most of the jobs men were required to do. It was a relentless activity and one requiring ingenuity, skill and hours of hard physical work every day.

There does not appear, in these accounts, to be a significant difference between the domestic duties of a married woman and a single woman, who is living with her parents or even in a boarding house. The diaries of Jennie McLean and Sophie Puckette reveal that young women were still expected to cook, sew, do washing, milk cows, pluck chickens and wild game; in short, do all the tasks carried out by married farm women, even when they were paying board in the home of a stranger.

The requirement to be the sole food producer and preparer, in combination with the reality that it was the women who stayed on the farm more than the men, inevitably created a new work role for farm women, as a host. The work involved in entertaining visitors, in many cases on a daily basis, was relentless, at times enormous, and often resented. Every visitor, regardless of the time of day of the visit, was offered food and drink. Many visitors were invited to stay the night, a courtesy extended due to the long distances that had to be travelled over poor roads in uncertain weather. For women accustomed to more formal social arrangements, the habitual dropping-in style of prairie hospitality was a surprise, and one to which they found it difficult to adapt. The volume of household work, particularly the cooking and baking, was significantly increased by the need to provide for visitors on a regular basis. "We have people in so continually and without any warning that I have to cook pretty frequently" Lillian Turner wrote.(Turner 1906-1908) Looking back on her homesteading years, Mary McCheane wondered how she managed it all:

> We were very hospitable. Everybody that came, eat. Stayed and had meals. And there were lots of friends and going and coming, I don't know however we did it, we couldn't just switch on an electric switch and have a kettle boiling . . . we had to go out and pick up sticks, and then we had to go to the well and pull water up from about forty feet with a rope over a pulley . . . no pump . . . I am amazed at the people that came in and stopped and were put up overnight and were fed . . . they never went to a hotel, any of them. There was a hotel there, yes. . . how did we do it? I don't know. I remember one time . . . putting everything down the cellar to make room. (McCheane 1907-)

"I think the thing that I found most trying was the unexpected visitor" wrote Monica Hopkins.(Hopkins 1909-1911) Kathleen Strange described her approach to the inevitable entertaining she faced every weekend. "On Saturday . . . I would bake sufficient food to last over till Monday, always making allowance for the possibility of visitors during the weekend. We always had a succession of visitors on Sunday afternoons." (Strange, 1920-

,219) The volume of food she prepared to feed her visitors is astonishing, and provides evidence that this aspect of farm life required significant effort and time. Helen Millar's life was a continual round of entertaining visitors. She had someone for tea or a meal every day and often as many as a dozen people, both men and women, who came to call daily. This may be partly due to the fact that her home served as both a post office and a store to the district, but she also hosted large events, such as serving a dinner to forty people on election day, and hosting a variety of political and community meetings. Her home appeared to be the social centre of the community. Harriet Neville's husband served as justice of the peace for the district. It was expected that she would provide meals for whomever was involved in the court case being resolved in their front room, as the community lacked a town hall. As she wrote "All this for my part without recompense, for who could charge neighbours for a meal? or for feed for horses?"(Neville 1882-1905,56) Catharine Neil welcomed the stimulation that visitors brought to her life, though she acknowledged the work involved in entertaining them.

> Our house always had the open door. Sunday was always my busiest day as there was always some of the village folk coming out to see the sheep or just for a visit. Many of the young teachers, away from their own homes, spent the weekends with us. . . . Although it meant a lot of baking and cooking for me, I was glad of the company in what was otherwise a dull life. (Neil 1905-)

It is important to note that the appearance of visitors, who would often come during the absence of the farm husband, had little effect on the workload of the man of the family. In some cases, if he was at home, his load was lightened, as male visitors offered to help out with a chore or special task he was undertaking that day.

Women were also called upon to provide services not available in new communities, to their own families and to other settlers. These included nursing, midwifery and housekeeping services, as well as preparing the dead for burial. Harriett Neville wrote that in one year she was the only attendant at six births and five deaths. Women also provided post office and courier services, which included purchasing needed items in town for neighbours. "I'm mail carrier for our district, and have to buy groceries, hardware, money orders, stamps, etc. for all and sundry and you can realize that it is not too easy to keep the money separate" wrote Barbara Slater in a letter to a friend.(Slater 1913) For some women, these demands were frequent and exhausting. Some of them required

resourcefulness and courage. While these services remain hidden in the social fabric of prairie life, nevertheless the amount of work, time and effort they extracted is significant. These activities were essential to sustaining human life. The work of women in these areas will be more fully discussed in chapter four.

It is clear from women's accounts that they did enjoy being busy and doing meaningful work. Work was a pleasure for many women, and they found the most pleasure in the work they did outside, and the care and teaching of their children. Many of these women had worked in households and in professions before they learned the work of homesteading. Work itself was not foreign to them. The volume, the pace, and the endlessness of the work on the homestead was new, and both overwhelming and depressing. Still, some women wrote about the way their work helped them develop a sense of purpose and identity, and a sense, as they tackled all kinds of new challenges successfully, that they could do anything. They found their work empowered them. These feelings of empowerment, confluent with their feelings that their work was drudgery and with their endless fatigue, created a particular and remarkable mix. It proved to be a powerful combination of feelings with which they identified with other farm women, and out of which farm women's political activities on the prairies were born.

Some women did not accept that their work duties should define their lifespace so completely. This was not a life they would choose for themselves. Many regarded it as a temporary stage in their lives, which was true for some women, while for others this "stage" would stretch into decades. Elizabeth Rockford Covey spent just enough time on the prairies before her anticipated marriage to a homesteader to develop an understanding of what the future might hold for her:

> I will not again, I think, become hysterical, and imagine the prairies to be a prison; one attack like that lasts a long time, and is quite sufficient. It is only when the face is set towards years of weary housework here, of banishment from the sweet refinements of life (for though we do try to emulate the life at home it can be easily seen how handicapped one is) and from all intellectual intercourse, that the mind and body are revolted by the prospect. There are several intellectual people here but how can a pleasant and instructive conversation be carried on, or ideas generated and exchanged, when the physical part of one is exhausted by dancing attendance on dough? . . . how

> can one think of anything or be anything but a Martha when one owns a house and no servant? (Covey 1901,183)

The socioeconomic class from which a woman came, particularly in her family of origin, influenced her views of the promises and potentials of homestead life. Women who had been accustomed to free time to pursue their own interests, and to hiring others to do housework and other chores, found the demands of farm or ranch life, especially where hired help was unavailable, difficult to meet with enthusiasm. Hilda Kirkland welcomed the change of circumstances that allowed the family to return to England, assessing her ten years of "roughing it" on the prairies by writing "Perhaps I am a more useful member of society for the training received there, but I should grieve indeed if I thought my girls would have to face all that I did". (Kirkland 1898-1907)

Some women complained that they seemed to work all day and didn't accomplish much: the repetitive nature of their tasks, most of them geared toward producing goods to be consumed or dirtied, so that women had to produce and wash again, would certainly support this complaint. Hilda Rose wrote that she loved to work but "this God-forsaken country gets me discouraged".(Rose 1908,18) Jennie McLean entered in her diary during her first summer on the prairie that she "never worked so hard in my life as since I came here" and she followed this entry with the remark "told father if he came here it was to please himself and not me by any means".(McLean 1908) Esme Tuck shared in her memoirs "There were times when even the stoutest heart quailed at the long hard hours of labour at times seemingly pointless as when the production level was reached and no market was available." (Tuck 1919-) Some women were lucky enough to escape the daily pressures of farm life once in a while. Beatrice Whitehair described farm life as "It was one persistent thing, one after the other. . . . No respite unless you could get away. So once in a while I'd say I'm going. I'm going to Calgary, and I'd go off down to my friend's."(Whitehair 1915-) Other women, though these were relatively few in number, were able to travel home to England, to the States or to Ontario to visit family and friends, particularly if there had been a good crop year (these were rare during this time period). For those who could not afford to travel long distances, the visits with neighbours or the

monthly meeting of the Women's Institute or United Farm Women would provide the only respite from the hard daily routine.

It is important to consider the place that leisure activities and favourite pastimes had in daily life on the homestead. Leisure activities fall into three types: those that were enjoyed at the end of a long day after the day's work was done; those that were specially planned and involved more than the immediate family; and those that were work activities that women considered recreational, because they were social in nature or involved an outing away from the regular routine. Most of the fun women enjoyed came from the last type of leisure activity where work accommodated some playfulness, or some relaxation, and the two flowed together. Berry picking, fishing, sewing, hunting and riding to check on livestock or fields, are examples of this type of leisure. At the end of a long day of work, a woman would often read, or write letters, sew or knit. Some of these were done strictly for pleasure, but more often out of necessity. Many women described long evenings of sewing clothes for the family after the children went to bed. Reading was a particular pleasure, and as will be described later, an essential antidote to a lifestyle of dull routine and limited conversation. Music also provided relaxation in a very special way, and those lucky enough to have a piano, organ or other instrument in the household put it to good use. More often music was a part of the third type of leisure activity, the social gathering, sometimes spontaneous, but more often a well planned and eagerly anticipated event. These included races, sporting events, picnics, teas, parties, concerts, plays, and box lunch socials and church services. Many of these occurred because of women's initiatives. One of the early ranchers, Mrs. Duthie, organized a women's missionary society, which planned a dinner and entertainment for cowboys of the district in 1884. "We got up a dinner for the cowboys. After planning the affair we rode out on horseback asking for donations from the cowboys. . . . Cowboys came from far and near to attend the dinner. It was the first of its kind known to be held in the country. After dinner we had a program."(Duthie 1884-) Jennie McLean described her role in the first social event of her farm community. "I took a can of sandwiches and 2 fig cakes. About fifty people there and everything came off pretty well. I was very much honoured at being convenor of the committee to arrange the program for this first social gathering of the community." (McLean 1908)

In more settled communities, such as the town of Innisfree as Sophie Puckette described it in her diary, more regular social evenings, such as debating clubs, literary clubs, and choir practices, were planned for entertainment. And of course, women's organizations, with regular monthly meetings featuring both social agendas and purposeful community or political work, became both possible and popular as rural areas became more populated. Several women described these regular organizational meetings as the highlight of their farming or ranching years.

One feature of all these planned social and recreational activities must not be overlooked: they involved a significant amount of work on the part of the women involved. Many women described the planning, baking, cooking, and sometimes sewing and decorating that these events entailed. Rarely did men put any effort into planning or preparing social activities, although they did often provide the music at special events. Without the initiative and hard work of women, many social events would never have taken place.

Double duty

> . . . perhaps the farmer's wife works hardest of all.
>
> Florence Low

Farm and ranch lifestyles for women are characterized by the blurring of boundaries between the work of the household and of the family business. When there are no clear cut lines between maintenance of the family and the ways in which the family earns its livelihood, women do double duty, working at both jobs simultaneously and alternately throughout the day. Historically this has been the pattern for women in agriculture for centuries, as well as for women in cultures based on the production of the means of subsistence in the home.[6] So while nineteenth century North American culture prescribes for the middle class urban woman an increased specialization in her "separate sphere" of the home, farm women were of necessity involved in all spheres of endeavour that ensured the survival of the farm and of its owners. "Drawing lines between men's and

women's work took second place to completing the work on the farm" observes Mary Neth in her study of mid western American farm families in the same time period.[7] The hidden problem in understanding women's double duty is that the farm work they did do was not considered "women's work " and so this work became invisible. In real terms, women did women's work and men's work, but men only did men's work, it was not a two-way exchange when it came to meeting the goal of "completing the work on the farm". Many women recorded their farm activities in terms of "helping" their husbands, even when their farm tasks were carried out separately and individually. And the definition of women's work in operative terms was whatever needed to be done, while the man's work was more identifiable as a finite list of farm tasks. This served to diminish the farm work activities of women even in the farm women's view, as is evident in some of the women's accounts of their work.

> In those days one had to be ready to turn their hand to most anything. . . . I did not take an active part in the outside work on the farm, aside from gardening, raising chickens, milking cows and such like, but two experiences remain in my memory; one was weeding the crops with the children hand-pulling each stalk . . . these were put in our sacks and later burned. It was a monotonous tedious job. (Maria Potter 1884-)

The day was a much longer one for women than for men. Once the farm work was done for the day and the sun had set, women still had to do the household and food production work that was always waiting for them. Bedtime at midnight, only to rise five hours later to begin all over again, was not uncommon for many women during the spring, summer and fall seasons.

> We really are busy morning, noon and night and what with outdoor work and housework I'm usually glad to go to bed instead of writing the letters I should. My birthday was spent on the trail hauling coal. George had one wagon and team and I drove another. We go 22 miles for it. . . . We have some hay to haul too. George has one hayrack and I drive another - they are such great cumbersome things and need very careful management for they so easily fall over and the prairie isn't the smoothest of roads. . . . It is just 10 pm and I have just mixed up my bread to rise overnight ready to bake after breakfast. (Barbara Slater 1914)

> Oh I was always with my husband and we worked. Until we moved to town I was still working in the field and ploughing and harrowing. . . . Oh yes, even when they were small, I had three children and four children and I had to go out haying and stooking and everything there was, helping my husband. We never hired any help. . . . I was always outside and they were inside. . . . I was so thankful sometimes that nothing happened. [did your husband help with the children]: Oh I think I didn't need any help. I was strong and healthy . . . . [work outside in the evening too in summer?]: Oh yes, especially at threshing time. The menfolk they got their hours and they went to sleep and I had to work sometimes all night. It wasn't years ago that you could buy bread and things like that. We had to bake it. So sometimes I'd stay up all night to get my work done. Washing clothes.
>
> (Magdalena Zeidler 1910-)

The role of farm women as fulltime hired hands was never fully recognized in legal or economic terms, and rarely in social terms. The need to deny this work performed by women came from its symbolic meaning: to the male farmer dependence on the free farm labour of your wife meant you were not successful enough as a farmer to relieve her of this labour by hiring a man to do it. The dependence on women's work was seen as a weakness. Here we have the macho and individualistic ethos at work in prairie culture. Because of men's egos, women's work went unrecognized and unrewarded beyond the farm gate, and sometimes even in the relationship between the farm husband and farm wife.

> Yes but a lot more hard work, hard work because we couldn't afford hired help you see, so I had to take that place. So I did everything with him and I'm glad I did. We had 30 years on the farm. (Beatrice Whitehair 1916-)

Women responded in emergencies by putting farm chores first and when economic necessity or war duty took farmers off their land, women worked the land on their own.

> We'd been hailed out and we were trying to save the hailed out crop and I and my husband, between us, put that I think it was 72 big loads, as much as the horses could pull, we stooked between us, together like . . . all through that harvest time my husband was out earning money and I did the crop . . . I noticed several times where I had cut twenty acres in a day [looking at her diary] . . . and then I'd have to hitch out and I'd have to come in see, and I'd have chores to do, cows to milk, the usual, chickens to feed.
> (Mary McCheane 1916-)

Ranching women substituted for missing hired hands, and helped out whenever an extra pair of hands was needed for rounding up cattle, branding or dipping cattle. All of the ranch women in this group except Evelyn Springett and Mary Inderwick did these kinds of activities. Inderwick arrived on her ranch pregnant, and her diary covers only the period of her pregnancy. It would have been inappropriate for her to perform work of this nature during the period in which she was writing (although other women did) but more significant in her case, it was unnecessary. The ranch was well managed by capable ranch hands and a cook, so that even her husband's frequent absences did not affect the days to day operations greatly, although the ranch failed to prosper and they were forced to abandon it three years later.

> In the intervals between . . . herders I substituted, doing my housework with saddled horse at the back door, ready for instant departure.
> (Clara Middleton 1904-)

> I spent much of the summer outside. Bought myself a pair of overall combinations and when my housework and Lloyd's barn chores were done, I'd don my overallls and go along with him whenever he was working.
> (Mary Tennis 1922-)

As Neth's research points out, farm women were not immune to the social pressures of the predominant middle class prescriptions for womanhood, to be the guardian angels of home and hearth. These ideas would only have significant influence as communities were well established and thriving, farms and ranches more prosperous and a "society" developed.[8] For most of the first generation of homesteading women, however, the precarious economic circumstances of their farms and ranches and the labour intensive nature of homesteading dictated that they would be the "hired men", either full-time or part-time, and perform double duty most of the year.

Children

Children were a welcome addition to a lonely existence on the homestead. Older children were invaluable as additional farm and household labourers and as companions to their parents as they worked and travelled. Barbara Slater reported that her young stepson Marvin attended the chickens and two ponies every morning, wiped the breakfast dishes, then did his lessons. If she was delayed out somewhere, Marvin got the meal ready. Gertrude Chase wrote about her son joining his father on trips to haul coal. At the age of six, Les Richards, Emma's son, walked over four miles daily to pick up the family's milk at a neighbour's, following stakes laid out on the prairie by his parents. Children were very important to women who stayed alone frequently, both as company and as extra workers to do the chores. In the families of Amelia Lucas, Mary Russell and others, it was the children and mother who kept the ranch or farm going while father was away.

Many women mentioned the work of baby raising in relation to getting their other responsibilities accomplished, but there is no regret expressed about the extra work that childcare brings.

> Dorothy is such a good baby now, she is restless toward the afternoon, but I get quite a lot of work done now. I finished one of her short dresses last night. (Eliza Wilson 1904

More often women expressed the delight they experience in having babies and children in the home, and the sense that the hard and relentless daily routine is enhanced and has new purpose when children arrive.

> I must confess the work became mere irksome drudgery, always excepting the part of it which concerned my babies three - <u>that</u> was all pure joy; they were so entirely my own, nurse forming no part of our simple life!
> (Hilda Kirkland 1898-1907)

> I think our greatest satisfaction lay in our children. They were a great help to us in our work and more than that were learning to take some future place in the schools of the country.(Harriet Neville 1882-1905,41)

Children did entail extra effort, particularly on the mothers' part, to feed, supervise and clothe them. Many women mentioned the growing task of sewing clothes for the family as more children are born, and the worry over the expense and availability of the materials and old clothes with which to make them. "Hard job to keep enough clothes made and washed" wrote Gertrude Chase in a letter home to her mother. "Don't suppose you have any old things that would make clothes that you could send? even old underwear. I make everything I can out of flour sacks but they need something warm in the winter."(Chase 1918-1923) Gertrude had three girls and a boy at the time of writing. Mary Tennis reported doing a "diaper wash" daily and the family wash - an all day affair - weekly. Many women wrote about staying up late each night, knitting, cutting and sewing clothes for their children out of whatever they could find.

The greatest additional effort required on women's part was the education of their children, and sometimes that included the education of other settlers' children too. The need to undertake this task was created by an absence of schools and teachers, or in some cases, the availability of a school only in the summer months.

> That first summer [on the homestead] I did not begin giving our children book lessons but encouraged them to find out what they could from nature around them, and ask questions for what they did not know. It made them fond of learning besides being good company for me. . . . That winter [1884-1885] I got Papa to make some low tables and chairs and we started a regular school. I sent to Toronto for books and a list of the studies. In my kitchen we kept regular school hours and I did my work not feeling anything but pleasure to keep my pupils busy and help them. We used part of the wall for a blackboard. (Harriet Neville 1882-1905)

> He [her stepson] walks 2.5 miles to school every day now but will not be going regularly much longer . . . it is time to expect winter, and then Marvin thinks I will be as good a teacher as Dr. Lonergan! (Barbara Slater 1911-1918)

The establishment of a school required a stable population of a certain size. Many districts went without schools, except for those that were informally organized by homesteading women with children. Some of these women, like Margaret Shaw, were trained teachers.

> But we could see the hand writing on the wall. There were no schools in the district and I was getting too many children to think of teaching them all, though the last six months we were on the ranch I took on the teaching of the two Cook boys for an hour a day. (Margaret Shaw 1900-)

> There were now several children in the district , and we were anxious to start a school, and so were the parents, so I put up a tent and Mr. Tom Lynch made a few benches. I had told the children to bring books from their homes. . . . We had a real good time, that was my salary, and in the fall we had to close on account of the cold. (Lena Kernen Bacon 1904-1908)

Mothers worried a great deal about the opportunities for education and social skill development available to their children. Several of the families moved seasonally to be closer to schools so their children could attend at least part of the year. Other families left the homestead altogether when they found education services too slow to develop in their district. The lack of a peer group to play with also concerned mothers of young children growing up on prairie homesteads. Mothers and fathers had to become both teachers and playmates to their children to compensate for the things that isolation had taken away.

> For the most part I was busy all day with three little children and my work. I did a lot of teaching by reciting nursery rhymes and poems I could remember, also singing all kinds of songs. I talked to them and we had little people discussions. They had no other playmates and I wanted them to be able to verbalize. (Elone Stobaugh 1929-)

For women who did not have children, the differences in their work days are evident. Without children to think about, Emma Rowe and her husband George seemed free to come and go as they please, and without children to keep her more tied to the household, Emma did a lot of outside ranch chores on a daily basis. Speaking of a neighbour, Mary Edey claimed "she didn't have to work as hard as some because she didn't have children".(1914-) And the lives of Esme Tuck and Monica Hopkins, despite the hard work they did every day, had a leisurely flow to them. They were free to move to whatever task or emergency required their presence anywhere on the farm or ranch,

without worrying about the care and safety of children, as Catharine Neil did whenever she carried out her ranching duties:

> When winter came, I had to drive the sleigh with the hay, while Jim forked it out to the sheep. My little children, three of them now, had to be left in the house alone. Many a time my heart was in my mouth, as the saying goes, wondering if they were touching the fires. (Neil 1905-)

The concern for their children's safety as the mothers carried out farm chores is a persistent theme in women's accounts:

> There were some chores to do in our sod barn and I went at three o'clock in the afternoon, did the chores and milk the cow. I had to leave the children in the house, I did not like that, but I saw to it that there was not too much fire in the stove and I put the children on top of the table, four of them, and told them to be sure and stay there till I come in a little while . . . then I told them to sing and then I would go outside in the barn and listen, and when I heard them I knew they were all right . . . it was not very good singing the children did, but it was music to me listening outside the barn. (Mollerud 1905-1913)

Mary Lubchyk spoke about the need to take the babies with her wherever she went, and during one of her chores of burning piles of brush, the fire got out of hand and nearly burned the baby.

Although women did not write a great deal about the extra work involved in raising their children, it is clear that most of this work fell to the female adult in the family and to older children. This work constituted another consuming task of often immense proportions, as large families of over five children were not abnormal. It would be inaccurate to say however, that large families were the norm, based on the writings used in this study. Some women had no children, many women had two to four, and the balance had larger families. Exact numbers are indeterminable, as many women's accounts do not coincide with their child raising years. The workload that children brought to a homesteading woman's life could be seen as a third full time occupation, which had to be mastered concurrently with farm work and household tasks. There was no sliding in and out of "roles", but rather a close enmeshment of demands that were ever present, unpredictable in nature, and often in competition with each other.

Home alone

One of the unexpected outcomes of this research was to discover the extent to which women lived and worked alone on prairie farms and ranches throughout the settlement period. Popular imagery of the homesteading couple describes them working side by side in the fields or the barn, or getting together frequently throughout the work day to consult and support each other and share meals together. While this did happen for most of the women and men in the group studied, it cannot be considered a consistent way of life for first generation homesteading couples. The frequency of men's absences away from the homestead, and often for long periods of time, is astonishing. The requirement for the man to work for cash elsewhere to enable the family to stay on the homestead was usually the reason for extended absences. They occurred more frequently at the beginning of homesteading years when no crops or other farm products were available to sell. Sometimes men left for long periods to look for better land or for business prospects. Short absences, of a week or less, were more frequent throughout the homesteading years. Some men were away every week for a short period of time. During short absences, some women left the ranch to stay with neighbours while their husbands were away. Sometimes the family hired a neighbour or hired man to assist with running the farm in the husband's absence. But staying alone and managing the workload alone was a regular part of a homesteading woman's life. Men left for a variety of reasons: to get supplies and mail, to take products to market, to check out new land or job opportunities, to live on another piece of land and cultivate it, to take seasonal employment in a mill, mine, on a railroad or on other farms, to seek medical assistance, to pick up relatives, to attend a round of country fairs, to have a good time in town with other women.

Women were left alone to do all the basic chores, deal with whatever weather or conditions, such as prairie fires, came along, and to look after children, neighbours and livestock.

> So just the two and I, we made it and he went to Calgary . . . so I ran the farm, money and everything. . . . I knew how to run the farm and I ran it and we did well that year, nearly two years before he came back again. . . . If he came to Calgary I had to stay at home, somebody had to be the boss of the place. And it was horses in those days you know. (Beatrice Whitehair 1915-)

Mary McCheane reported that during her first year on the homestead all the men had to leave to work clearing land for the railroad, as without crops or other goods to sell the families needed cash to survive. The women and children fended for themselves for the winter. Mrs. Edward Watson described in her essay how she and her children managed to build a sod barn while her husband was working away from the homestead:

> In the meantime the children and I built our first sod barn. It was only fourteen by fourteen feet, but it was necessary to have a place to put the cow. The job was hard and we did not have much to work with. We had gotten a fire guard broken and it was from that we got the necessary sod. The two oldest children carried the sod between them on a board, and I did the building. This was an exceedingly slow way, as the poor children could not carry enough to keep me busy; so I made a harness for the cow and made her help us in hauling the sod. This was a little better, but as the harness was not very substantial it was continually breaking and made things very trying, and because of this I had a job every evening of either repairing the old harness or making a new one. The utensils I had to level the sod consisted of an old butcher knife and the sticks which were lying around. Finally it was completed, and a roof was made from poplar poles which we managed to get out of the valley nearby. (Watson 1905-)

Women left alone fought prairie fires and bush fires, sometimes single-handedly, and dealt with unexpected Indian visitors, strange men looking for a place to stay, and raging thunderstorms and snowstorms. Maria Potter recalled in her memoirs:

> But perhaps the most terrifying experiences I had were the dreaded prairie fires which in the fall would sweep over the prairies for miles, destroying everything in their path. . . . It always seemed as if my husband was away when the first fires came . . . how I used to wish a fire would come before Al started on his rounds. For once it passed, even though there was nought but a blackened waste with the grey farm in the midst, yet one then had a feeling of security . . . [during one fire] As we were going along, fear overcame me, and the children looking out the window and exclaiming "why don't she hurry?" little knew that my legs could scarcely carry me, let alone make progress. So I told the man to go ahead and I followed as best I could. All afternoon I fought the blaze. (Potter 1884-)

"A strange man came, asking for lodging for the night" wrote Maria Potter. "I was terrified to be there with just the small children for company, but we did not see how we could turn him away."(Potter 1884-) Both Mrs. Buchanan and Lillian Turner wrote about their fears when confronted by Indians on the doorstep while home alone.

> The only time I was really frightened, was once when I was quite alone on the ranch when three very disreputable looking Indians rode up, wanting to trade moccasins for flour and tea. This I gave them but they did not go away but watched very closely and conversed aside together until I felt quite nervous. Every minute seemed an hour but I knew I must not let them know my state of mind, so I went outdoors and called Robert (my husband's name) several times. Then I went back and told them the white man would soon come, although I confess I did not know for certain when Mr. Buchanan would put in an appearance, but hearing this they leaped on their horses and galloped off. After that when Strangers came I frequently went into the next room and talked just as if someone had been there, and never let them know I was alone.
>
> (Buchanan 1883-1905)

> Everything was O. K. until about noon. . . . Who should loom up but an Indian with all the war paint and feathers of the tribe. You can imagine how I felt. . . . Well. He stood and stared at me and I stared at him. I knew there wasn't a man within two miles at least and my best safety was in bravery. . . . I had the shotgun close at hand and think I would have used it if it had been necessary. . . . Well, he kept creeping up closer to me and trying to peek in the house. I was getting more frightened all the time. He took a good look around and finally went off behind the house . . . it seemed like a day before Rose got here about three o'clock. (Turner 1906-1908)

Many women hated being left alone on the homestead to manage by themselves. They were fearful, and they disliked being solely responsible for everything. Mrs. Sparks described her first night alone on the prairie:

> And there was I, the first woman in the settlement, a woman that had never spent a night alone in her life, alone in a tent with six small children. I could not see a shack, nor did I know the road to any. There were some bachelors but I did not know where to find them. I carried a lot of posts that some early rancher had around his hay stack, piled them around the bottom of the tent, lit the lantern and took the axe inside to protect us from prairie wolves, as I had always heard the coyotes called. The daytime was lonely but the night was awful. . . . In the meantime a bunch of range cattle had come along and fought with our precious cow. She broke loose and went off with them. As I had a baby six months old on the bottle, this was the worst that had happened yet. The baby had his last feed long before the men arrived and needless to say I was about distracted. But the men caught the cow on the way home and the day was saved. (Sparks 1910-1918)

Emma Richards also found being left behind to manage on her own worrisome:

> The day came when they should go to Swift Current and get the lumber etc. . . . They had to walk all the way. It meant we had to be left behind and it was lonesome. They told us not to go away from the house or we may get lost. Honestly I thought the time would never come when they would get back home again. I thought of many things what if they didn't come back, where would we get more food and how long would it be before someone came along and how long would the wood last, . . . I think I would have gone crazy if I hadn't had the children. (Richards 1906-)

Even if farm or ranch chores were taken over by hired men, women found their periods of staying alone, whether for a day or a week, very hard on their nerves. They worried about their husbands' safety as much as their own. Barbara Slater wrote to a friend "It nearly worries me gray to have to stay at home and know he is out in blizzards and storms such as we had then."(Slater 1911-1918) Ellen Lowes recorded in her diary "The men were often away for long periods on horseback, rounding them up and getting tab on them. I often had to stay alone, wondering where Johnnie was staying the night, and when he would get back".(Lowes 1882-1900) She also described her first time spent alone on the homestead, as her husband sought work in another location as "a week which had been a nightmare for me". Left alone with "the cow and calf, the fowl and the pig to look after" she admitted "I had not been accustomed to staying alone, and at night time I would become so frightened of the things my imagination invented that I was hours going to sleep".(Lowes 1882-1900) Mary Cummins wrote revealingly of how ill-prepared she was at first to handle her husband's inevitable absences:

> It was hot summer and I was to be left alone for the first time but Colin promised to be back early in the afternoon. About two o'clock there was a terrible thunderstorm . . . I got into a terrible fright about him, being caught in that storm, being killed by lightning, the pony kicking him off, plus a dozen other fears. When he had not arrived by six o'clock, when I put the children to bed, I wandered up and down the trail though afraid to leave the house. I believed myself to be completely forsaken with no one near me. When he eventually arrived at eight pm. I was in a fine state of hysterics. He picked me up on the trail where I had flung myself to die. (Cummins 1883)

Kaja Froyen wrote that her preacher husband was "seldom at home" and that they had to get help "as I did not like to stay alone when Papa was on his long trips".(Froyen 1904-1913) As Froyen was located on an isolated homestead with several babies and livestock to care for, her sentiments are understandable. Women with husbands who were

professional men, such as preachers or doctors, were frequently left to manage on their own while their husbands carried out their professional activities. Mrs. St. John noted carefully each day in her diary that she spent alone and how she spent it. The loneliness of staying alone, even with children to keep one busy, is a recurring theme in many accounts. Elone Stobaugh wrote about the long winter nights when she had only reading to occupy herself after the livestock were fed and the children were put to bed. Stories cut out of the Kansas City Star and sent by her mother were her "only entertainment and companionship".(Stobaugh 1929-) "It was terribly lonesome" Emma Richards writes about the five weeks she and her children spent on their own while the men were off putting up hay.(Richards 1906-) And the loneliness drove many women to stay with relatives or neighbours, or hire someone to stay with them, when husbands had to be away from the homestead.

Men's absences would have long term effects on the farm operation, the community and the women who were left to manage on their own. As Dawson and Yonge point out, "agriculture under such conditions was cramped and anticipatory . . . his [the farmer's] attention was divided between agriculture and outside interests. He often spent long periods away from the farm community. His participation in community enterprises and institutions was limited."[9] This meant that the work of building community services essential to the family, such as education and health, churches, libraries and charitable work, became women's work, because the needs were pressing, and women were the only ones who could respond to them.

Prosperity

There is real irony in the lives of homesteading families who finally enjoy the prosperity they worked so hard to achieve. Women reflected in their memoirs that prosperity only brought more work, further enslavement to the enterprise they had established. It was even harder to escape for a day to town, harder to take a break in the day for a moment

of relaxation. This was more true for women in mixed farming than for ranching women, because of the nature of their work, as already discussed.

> In the fall of that year 1906 a few settlers came in. We had many a pleasant evening in one and another's homes. Our hearts were light. We had no stock and not much to do. (Margaret Smith 1906-)

> In those first delightful days of making a home we were free from the coils of too much activity. We had little land to cultivate and few material possessions and were able to spend our leisure hours wandering through the woods and open meadows round the cabin. . . . Every year of improvement added to our labours. We began to find ourselves servants of the soil and of our domestic animals. (Esme Tuck 1919-)

The other feature that prosperity brought to women's lives was a more rigid division of tasks by sex, characterized largely by a removal of women from outside or farm tasks, and making domestic activities their exclusive domains. This was often aided by the ability to hire outside help for farm chores, but as Kathryn Strange points out, prosperity also expanded the amount of household work women had to do. "For the first year or so I managed without help. But as our activities increased, my own work expanded, until I found that a permanent hired girl was absolutely essential."(Strange 1920-,224) Many women welcomed a change in their workloads, though ironically for some, the work they most enjoyed was the work that men were hired to do.

As farms became more established the influences of the outside world, both the media in the forms of farm journals and magazines, and government programs, such as those sponsored by the Departments of Extension in Agriculture Ministries, promoted a distinct female role on the farm.[10] The promotion of beautification programs for farms as a farm woman's responsibility shows the shift in priorities that came with prosperity.[11] These sources of influence followed more closely the middle class urban model of women's work than the realities of farm women's lives. This model stressed aesthetics of home and garden, and new skills like interior decorating, activities for which most farm women had neither the time or money. Yet some farm women believed that these were the lifestyle standards to be emulated. Age was another factor. As some women reached the prosperity years, they were also more infirm and less energetic, and less inclined to do

heavy work, and fight the elements. Prosperity did allow them more choices, and an opportunity to resist the heavy work expectations of earlier years. Ranch women did not experience as dramatic a shift in their responsibilities as farm women did as the family enterprise became more prosperous. Their participation in ranch work, although essential, was less demanding physically and more sporadic. They were, along with more prosperous farm families, used to clearer delineation between what was considered men's work and women's work and they were used to having a little more free time.

For many women prosperity brought only more worry, as years of hard work could easily be destroyed in one quick prairie fire. When they had accumulated more stock, equipment and other possessions, there was more to lose. Natural disasters such as swamp fever, heavy snowstorms, and hailstorms could destroy this hard earned wealth in one season as the accounts of Mrs.Robert Buchanan detail. The time and energy required to recover from heavy losses could sometimes not be found. It was just too hard to start over again.

Prosperity was not a state enjoyed by the majority of women in this study, one reason being that most of them were farmers, not ranchers. The initial capital required to set up a ranch was so much greater than a homestead,[12] and this initial difference in resources would prevail and broaden over the years: the well off got richer, the less well off struggled year after year. Ranching was also a more lucrative enterprise that usually meant higher returns on investments than farming. And though both types of enterprise were at the mercy of the weather, a single hail storm or prairie fire was often more destructive to a farm family's livelihood. Significant numbers of families left the homestead before they were blessed with an abundant return for their years of hard labour. Many women would assess their years as Mrs. Buchanan did. She wrote in her story :"We had many ups and downs, more downs than ups it seemed at times". (Buchanan 1883-1905)

In summary, there are several features of homesteading women's daily lives and labour that are important. The first is the intersection of time and place that made the Canadian prairies more similar to Europe in the eighteenth century than like the rest of Canada. This creates a unique set of circumstances in which women found themselves setting aside most of their learning to acquire new skills, and to work at tasks that they would never

have imagined themselves doing in their former lives. The demands of homesteading required that they do a wide variety of work activities, be flexible, physically strong, creative and sometimes ingenious in their approach to their work. In most cases, they also had to be equally available to fulfil household and farm responsibilities. Children brought more work but it was welcomed as a pleasurable activity, although the extra sewing a growing family entails was not. Women found themselves working and living alone frequently, a situation that demanded an ability to carry out most farm tasks, and sometimes courage and resourcefulness in times of danger. Prosperity was a mixed blessing for the farm woman. As it brought an opportunity for increased leisure and mobility, it also meant for some a more specialized work role and new standards in that role to go with it. For some women who were more isolated, the prosperous farm was a more demanding taskmaster, as more livestock, land and possessions meant less time for relaxation or for a trip to town.

More than other factors in her life, what a woman does with her time and energies becomes central to her identity as a social being. The job requirements of a homesteading woman, to be proficient at many and widely varied tasks, to be available at all times, to ensure that all were fed and clothed, to put all others and all tasks before herself and her own needs, and to work without the conveniences and equipment available to her urban contemporaries, served to shape the woman herself. In time it also shaped the social expectations of women. All of the expectations about how a woman spent her time and served others could be carried out by a man. The fact that they were not the expectations for a man who is homesteading, but for the woman who is his daughter or his married partner, or hired woman, tells us a great deal about the social construction of gender on the prairies. An obituary from a 1928 edition of the Regina Leader Post illustrates this cultural adoption on the prairies of a particular definition of womanhood:

> All the Qualities of A Pioneer in Mrs. M. Dougens
>
> Friends Recall Courage and Devotion in Early Days of Deceased
>
> Lady
>
> In her person passes one of the earliest pioneers of the district and one of the most respected. Those who knew her declared that she typifies the courage of the pioneer woman and the devotion to home which found its fervent expression in her. Moreover it is the tribute of her friends that she was helpful

> to her neighbours and contributed a great deal towards the happiness and comfort of those, who like herself, were attempting to set up homes in the new land. In all they say she displayed the finest qualities that the stress and toil of pioneering could bring out.[13]

This obituary speaks of courage and devotion in response to the stress and toil of pioneering. While it is important to know and to understand the central place of women's work in settling the prairies, it is equally important not to turn it into something it was not. It was work necessary for survival, "hard work, and plenty of it" as one woman said. It was not an act of devotion nor a labour of love. It was effort and stamina and courage exacted from each woman at a very high cost. It changed not only their own lives, in ways many of them did not choose or enjoy, but it also changed the practice of womanhood, as they understood it, in profound and lasting ways. The social individuals that are produced from these daily productive activities, as varied and unquantifiable as they are, are women of a new social order. This order is characterized by the appropriation of their labour by their male partners to such a degree as to render it socially invisible while at the same time it was essential to successful settlement. It also is characterized by appropriation of their labour by the community in ways that allowed social institutions, like government, to remain unresponsive and irresponsible during the settlement years. These themes are explored further in chapter four as women's work and well being are examined in relation to their living conditions.

Chapter Four: Safety and Sanity

> To homestead is to be drenched with rain, caked with mud, choked with dust, chilled with cold, warmed by the sun, to rise early and go to bed late, to wonder whether roads and railway will ever come one's way, whether one has come to the right place or not, what the future holds in store for oneself and one's children, to be tired, to work, to laugh, to help the other fellow and always to hope.
>
> Esme Tuck

> Civilization is gone and only the little band of lonesome women here remember it.
>
> Hilda Rose

Most of homesteading women's writings and interviews contain stories of the difficult conditions they confronted in building their homes and their lives on the prairie. These stories are often more frequent and more colourful than other memories, and tell us a great deal about the women themselves, as well as about prairie life as they experienced it. This chapter deals with various conditions, events and relationships that significantly influenced the safety and the sanity of women on prairie farms and ranches. It also describes the ways in which women negotiated the challenges that confronted them, and the feelings of emotional distress and of triumph that surviving these challenges created.

Living conditions

Women were not reluctant to comment on the conditions and quality of their lives on homesteads, nor the cultural and natural environment in which they found themselves. They spoke freely of their discouragements, and of the natural forces, such as weather, mosquitoes, floods, and prairie fires that seemed to work against them, and at times, terrorized them. The problems and limitations imposed by their geographic location and isolation, including poor water supplies, poor trails for travelling, no local medical services or stores, were also part of their narratives. And central to their feelings of deprivation were the difficulties they experienced in making homes pleasant and private places for

themselves and their families, and in acquiring food and materials for making clothing for their children.

While the living conditions were most primitive and difficult to bear in the earliest years of homesteading, it was the lasting nature of some conditions that wore women down. Many were able to deal with the immediate challenges posed by establishing their first home, but the lack of improvement in their situation as the years progressed, and the reality that the better life "next year" may never come, made some conditions even more insufferable. As Kathleen Strange wrote in 1922 " Next year! How sick I get of hearing those words. They are a common expression among all Western farmers" (Strange 1922, 250).[1] Mary Tennis is frank in her assessment of the unchanging nature of homestead life:

> A lot of people seem to think ours is an interesting life here in the pioneer country. I suppose it is, but, for my part, I'd like to miss a lot of it. . . . The work we do is enough to wear down younger people. . . . As time passes, I find it more and more difficult to keep up my courage and cheerfulness. Have to make a conscious effort almost all the time. Maybe the "trying age in a woman's life" has something to do with it, but, it seems to me that we here on the homesteads have more than our share of hardships and not enough of much else. I get so tired of these dismal houses that are our homes. No matter how hard one tries, it seems impossible to make them clean and cheerful . . . I still need such a lot of things to make my work easier.
> (Tennis 1930)

Jennie McLean is equally unimpressed with prairie homestead life:

> Father is pretty tired tonight - said today we were just simply existing here and everything we read is history. The primeval days are too much for Dad and I - we will be glad to get back home to Bowmanville - Father said he might come out every summer for the three years and make that place his own then give it to Colin but he doesn't think he could make this his home and hurrah - I'm awfully glad for I would be about as well dead as living here all my life.
> (McLean 1908)

For many women the fear of unchanging circumstances, that homestead life will remain the same as they first experience it, and of the effects it may have on them and their children, were disturbing thoughts:

> You don't know how anxiously I look in the glass as the years go by, and wonder if I'll ever get to look like the rest of the natives here. You have seen overworked farmers' wives, with weather-wrung and sorrow-beaten faces, drooping mouths and a sad look. I want to go back, I don't care where, and have friends once more. I must not look like that - No! No! I want to be elected president of a club, and go to socials, and I want to eat ice cream.
> (Hilda Rose circa 1907)

> My greatest desire now is to change the circumstances which surround us and prevent our being able to give them [her children] a proper education and social advantage. This is such a narrow life in so many ways.
> (Mary Tennis circa 1930)

> I left without regret, for never did I feel life on the prairie to be anything but exile, and England was always "home". Discipline is salutary, but one may have too much of it! and ten years of "roughing it " reduced me to a physically nervous condition from which it took years to recover. . . . I should grieve indeed if I thought my girls would have to face all that I did. (Hilda Kirkland, 1918)

Lillian Turner wrote to her parents:

> I do wish you would come too. You both would enjoy it for a few months, and you would learn to appreciate Ontario. . . . I don't think this country is the place for old people and people who have nice homes back east should know enough to stay there. I think perhaps in a few years there will be great improvements, but it take time and will be twenty-five years anyway before things are like they are back home. (Turner 1906)

Not all women viewed their new circumstances unfavourably. Alice Rendell speaks for many immigrants who sought a better life in Canada than the one they left behind:

> We are quite happy and contented, very much better off than we were in England, whilst as to food we live quite as well as we ever did. . . . Certainly we have had difficulties to surmount and hardships to endure but we quite expected we would before we left England and we treasured up a reserve fund of determination and pluck which stood us in good stead when the need came. I would never advise anyone to come out here who is the least afraid of work. They are better off at home. There is plenty of room to breathe in this country and if the work is hard the freedom, which is the indispensable attribute of the life here, makes one far less susceptible to physical fatigue than in England where one seems to have such a feeling of weighty oppression to handicap one's energies.(Rendell 1903)

The natural environment of the prairies posed the most serious challenges to the safety and comfort of homesteading families. Stories of extreme weather conditions are legion, and winters proved to be the subject of most hardship stories:

> In the intervals between stable and feeding chores and the emancipation of felled trees it was almost unbearably cold. On Monday January 14, I learned from my neighbour that the temperature had dropped to fifty five below. I begged that he would not tell me of any further descent, and felt thankful that I didn't possess a thermometer.
>
> (Georgina Binnie-Clark 1906)

> They all tell me I'll not feel the cold much for the first year or two. All I can say is that if I'm going to feel it much more I'm going home to England. . . . The weather is still terribly hot and no rain at all. . . . It certainly is a country of extremes.
>
> (Monica Hopkins 1909)

> We had benefitted by old timers on the trail to have plenty of wood as that winter some may remember was very severe. We were completely snowed up and had to dig tunnels to get out. We had walls of snow 18 feet high. No one could see the house unless they came through those tunnels . . . all the light we had was a four pane window and when the blizzards lasted for three days we had to get out every ten minutes and dig it out or sit in the dark, as we had to be careful of the oil. On several occasions we had to put the youngest of the family through the roof where we had one pane of glass to dig out the door, as we were completely snowed in.
>
> (Margaret Smith 1906)

> Winter was of seven months' duration and of great severity, the thermometer falling to 40 degrees, and even to 50 or 60 degrees below zero, and rarely rising above zero. Only those who have lived through several of these winters can realize the discomfort, hardships and even suffering that it means. As winter advances the springs and wells freeze, and one is dependent for water supply upon melted snow, not only for all household purposes, but water for the horses and cattle. The house was a frail wooden structure, which we tried to keep warm with wood fires - and failed!
>
> (Hilda Kirkland 1918)

Women who settled in northern Alberta had even harsher winters to face:

> Keeping warm at night was an impossibility. . . . Every morning at dawn when I pulled my frozen hair off the pillow, I counted my toes. Surprisingly enough they were there - all ten of them . . . looking back on our life in the bush I realize tragedy was ever near at hand. We were two against the elements trying to prove that survival was possible.
>
> (Peggy Holmes circa 1922, 115)

> At times the cold was frightful. 'Stabbed like a driven nail' is a true description . . . . When a wind was blowing it did not matter how many garments I put on, I was perished . . . . Many a time before we had our cabin secure against the assaults of frost we woke in the morning with our hair stiff where our warm breath had settled. Many a time I have taken a hatchet to chop off a pound of butter to put on the breakfast table.
>
> (Esme Tuck circa 1920)

> . . . getting acclimated to the cold was another matter. I suffered intense torture that first winter. If I stepped outdoors for a moment, even all wrapped up, I'd have the tears smarting sown my face and my skin would feel as if it were being minutely flayed by a thousand little knives.
>
> (Mary Lawrence 1898)

1906 was remembered as a particularly harsh winter on the Canadian prairies:

> Last Friday the thermometer stood at 65 degrees below zero, and for the last three weeks has varied from 40 to 60. If that isn't Yukon weather I never heard of it. People here get noses, cheeks, hands and feet frozen often. . . . The wood is a hard problem all right although with some hay has been worse. Imagine going twelve miles and further fo. hay and having to go every day, storm or not. . . . I can hardly wait for spring I am so tired of being shut in. . . . We have had no church or Sunday School for a long time. The Mounted Police are out southeast of here interviewing the homesteaders. Reports of much suffering have gone to Saskatoon and they are out investigating. . . the hospital in Saskatoon is full and every patient but one. . . are frost bites. It is reported that some people have had to burn their furniture to keep warm.
>
> (Lillian Turner 1906)

Hardship came in many forms. Bitter cold and above average snowfalls decimated the livestock herds of ranchers and farmers. "The winter of 1906-07 was extremely hard" wrote Kaja Froyen, " and thousands of cattle and horses perished".

Many women noted the weather conditions daily in their diaries. The weather and its inherent dangers and possibilities were to be respected. One diary is humorous in its religious recording of climatic changes: regardless of the severity of the temperature, the force of the wind, or the sting of the hot sun, it was always a "fine day". The author, Helen Millar, could be admired for her positive outlook, but in reality, many of the rough weather days she stayed indoors, and could observe what a "fine day" it was through her window! (Millar 1891) It is most interesting to compare the entries for the different seasons in Eliza Wilson's 1901 diary:

> Jan 6 - all the walls white again with frost; Jan 12 - the wind blew 30 ft of the roof of the circle sheds, the wind was fearful for a day or two; Aug 15 - What a dreadfully hot stifling day, the hottest day we have had yet, and the air was heavy all morning with the smoke of a prairie fire. Aug 21 - mosquitos fearful tonight; Aug 26 - still smoky yet. It was a fearful wind storm last night.

Wind and its power was a common theme in women's accounts. "The winds were always hard on people, hard on the nerves" wrote Mrs. Stedman.(Stedman 1884) Lillian Turner reported being hit by a cyclone, which "moved the barn off its foundations and blew the dishes off the table".(Turner circa 1907)

Homestead accounts show a preoccupation with the weather. The concern about the havoc bad weather could create made it a subject on everyone's minds. As Edna Banks observed:

> The weather was number one topic of conversation among us all. We were almost slaves to the weather, as far as talking about it, because talk was the only thing we could do about it. . . . Scientific forecasting was unheard of at that time and we had to be our own forecasters. (Banks 1911, 56)

Most painful to bear was the destruction the weather brought to the precious crops that represented not only months of labour, but the next year's income and plans.

> I could never tell what that destruction [a hail storm] meant to us. . . . I must say that I had watched that grain from the time the first tiny green blades appeared until the very day of the tragedy - for tragedy it truly was. I had feasted my eyes upon its beauty and fed my soul with the hopes that were centred in those beautiful billowy golden acres. . . . I didn't go out into the fields until the next day. I just couldn't. When I went, I went alone. I did not want anyone to be with me when I went to view the wreck of the summer's work and the winter's hope, for I knew it would be my hour of weakness . . . if

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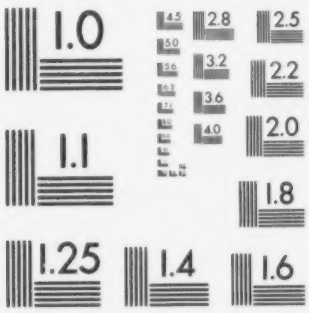
NBS 1010a ANSI/ISO #2 EQUIVALENT



PRECISION[SM] RESOLUTION TARGETS

there is anything certain, it is that the farmer . . . is still at the mercy of conditions he cannot modify, much less control. (Sarah Roberts 1907,126,208)

In June we looked for thunder-storms of tropical violence, sometimes bringing with them hailstorms with hailstones the size of hen's eggs, warranted to destroy every growing thing in field or garden. Twice in ten years we lost crop and garden produce, besides every window in the house being broken! Once our house was struck by lightening, the walls torn open, mirrors shivered to atoms, and my babies three received severe shocks from which they did not recover for several days. Only the bursting of a cloud simultaneously with the shock saved the house from fire.

(Hilda Kirkland 1918)

When we arrived at our barnyard, we saw hailstones floating in rivulets of running water. There were a number of drowned fowl, and young pigs squealing and attempting to go for shelter. What we could see of field and garden was flattened beyond hope. Trees were stripped of leaves and the silhouettes appeared like autumn scenery.

(Margaret Thompson circa 1921)

Mrs. Cayford wrote "We have suffered losses from frosts and once almost completely wiped out by hail in the space of five minutes".(Cayford circa 1910) Mrs. St. John recorded in her diary: "[August] Our first cyclone - we took to the cave. . . . [September] Frost kills my garden and flowers."(St. John 1902) Mrs. Buchanan wrote "Our crops were frozen three years in succession".(Buchanan circa 1905) Edna Banks observed "Always the fear of drought and crop failures hung over the head of the Western farmer, like the sword hung over the head of Damocles."(Banks 1912,60) She described the dust storms that drought brought:

Many days were grey with the thick clouds of the drifting soil that had hid the sun; dust and sand sifted into the house through the walls and the closed windows on which were winter's storm windows, on to the floor, the tables, the chairs and your bed was smothered in dust. Off three floors, two bedrooms and the living room, after two dust storms on two consecutive days, I swept up and weighed fifteen pounds of pure clay as fine as powder. (Banks 1912, 66)

Prairie fires were a frightening and often devastating part of life on the prairies. Wind and sometimes human carelessness combined to produce tragedy beyond comprehension to

homestead families. The year 1903 became notorious as the year of the great prairie fire in Saskatchewan. It destroyed over seven thousand square miles of hay needed to feed animals. Mrs. St. John and Hilda Kirkland described the effects of prairie fires on their families:

> Wind changes - we become anxious about the fire. At 10 am. fire is so near, all work is abandoned and we are watching the prairie. While we are at dinner the wind changes to the northeast and the fire is upon us, burning all the country for miles around. . . . Mr. Lundrigan brings us the sad news that our hay - over one hundred tons - which our men put up in the slough last fall - was all destroyed by the fire, day before yesterday. . . . Last night we could read a newspaper by the reflection in the sky, from the prairie fire which is still raging in the big swamps 30 miles south of us. It is a fearful sight . . .
>
> (St. John 1905)

> Every autumn we knew we must expect prairie fires, and then when one was in sight it was an anxious time indeed. . . . Sometimes, having decided it was far enough away, and the wind in the wrong direction for it to come upon us, we went to bed, to be awakened an hour later to find it right upon us, a sudden change of wind having brought it down with a rush. . . . It was a case of all hands out, both men and women, with wet sacks and brooms, to beat out the lines of flame and save the buildings. Twice we lost our winter supply of hay through these awful fires, and the year before we left three horses were burnt so badly that the only humane course was to shoot them.
>
> (Kirkland 1918)

Alice Rendell and Mabel Hawthorne described the fear they felt as they witnessed their first prairie fires and narrowly escaped losing their homes. Alice remained "very nervous after all I had witnessed"(Rendell 1903) and Mabel remembered the sight the next morning, "the prairie as far as the eye could see was as black as charcoal"(Hawthorne circa 1906). Women were often alone with their children when prairie fires threatened the homesteads, and even when the men were home, women usually had no choice but to get involved in battling the fires:

> I and our eldest daughter, only a mere child but who knew just what to do, went with wet sacks to watch places along the fire guards where fire might creep or jump over. . . . After a long time a huge wall of fire that stretched from the Cottonwood creek to as far as our eyes could see on the west rolled up to the back fires, [swung] around the end of them and died down in front of our buildings. Then it blazed fiercely up in the distance as it swept its way

past the homestead and the buildings were safe once more, but the hay in the flat on the preemption was all burned.

(Harriet Neville circa 1885)

At last we could stand still no longer and we three women rushed out and filling buckets with clay and soil dug up from the foundation we scattered it all over the ground immediately around the house. The wind was blowing a hurricane bringing or rather throwing the fire straight on to us. The awful roar of the flames was enough to make the bravest shudder and the smoke and smell stifling. . . . Apart from the horror of it, it was a most wonderful sight of course - on the prairie you can see an enormous distance and for thirty or forty miles there was nothing but flames. . . . I earnestly trust that I may never witness another. (Alice Rendell 1903)

A terrible prairie fire broke out far up west, it seemed where our hay had been put up . . . the country was very thinly settled and in an event like that every man - and sometimes every woman- turned out to do their part. The fire itself had spread for miles all over the country and every settler was out fighting it and of course, my husband could not return home. I was here all alone with my little son . . . and I did not sleep all night watching the course of the fire . . . the noise of the roar of the flames was so great that it sounded like hundreds of wagons rattling along and about 8:00 am. was within a mile of our home but separated from it by a small ploughed field. (Eliza May circa 1890)

Kaja Froyen described prairie fires as "so frequent" and Catharine Neil recalled that "many a night our men were out all night fighting with sacks and sheepskins."(circa 1908) Clara Middleton wrote that only one prairie fire came near their homestead, and "it was one too many". She recalled collecting buckets, taking them down to the spring and carrying water to the men.(Middleton 1905,47) Lillian Turner wrote in her letter home that one quarter of their homestead was burned off by a fire before they could get it under control. "I can tell you it was fierce and we had to do some hustling for a while" she wrote.(Turner 1907) Sometimes the futility of the fight was depressing.

Prairie fires were a yearly occurrence . . . these fires usually started from some unknown source, and if no resistance was met within their path of destruction, would sweep onward demolishing all that lay before them. I remember how hard we fought one morning with brooms and sacks, trying to save some pasture for the stock. We had succeeded fairly well and were feeling fully repaid for our efforts when, without any warning whatever, the flames came rolling in from another opening, so that the corner we had saved was robed like the rest in smouldering black. (Deyell, circa 1900)

As she fought her first prairie fire on her farm, Georgina Binnie-Clark had "the one absolutely bitter moment of my life on the Canadian prairie". She realized that after all the ups and downs she had experienced in her "farming experiment", "only the fire would wipe everything away". In reflection, she felt her escape from "threat of grave loss and danger" did her much good, for it taught her not to put off what must be done to safeguard her livelihood. (Binnie-Clark 1908, 283)

There was a natural relationship between the two plagues of the prairies: fires and mosquitoes. Without prairie fires to keep the land dry and parched, mosquitoes would flourish. So while the reprieves from fires were welcome, the mosquito plagues created by their absence were real torture for many homesteaders. "The mosquitoes and black flies . . . were little short of a plague at certain seasons of the year" wrote Evelyn Springett. (Springett 1937, 137) Many immigrants had never experienced mosquito bites before, and mistakenly felt their suffering was greater for their inexperience. "With all the handicaps we had as the summer wore on not the least of our trials was the mosquitos, and seeing we were fresh, we had our full share of them" Margaret Smith recalled. (Smith 1906) For most women, the first season of mosquitoes was the worst. "My first summer was made very miserable with mosquitoes. They had decided I was something fresh, and no doubt green, and they were evidently fond of Scotch. My arms and legs were a mass of blisters and I could not keep from scratching them" Catharine Neil wrote in her memoirs. (Neil 1905)

As homesteaders had to live and work primarily outdoors in spring and summer, the mosquito problem must have been unbearable. Following fifty days of spring rain, "Mosquitos swarmed around like bees. Out on the prairie it was hardly safe to open one's mouth for fear of getting a mouthful of them" Mrs. Cayford recalled.(Cayford 1922) "They assailed us day and night without mercy" wrote Esme Tuck.(Tuck 1920, 26) As Alice Rendell pointed out, even sleep was difficult because of the mosquitoes. "We are nearly tortured to death with mosquitoes. The poor children are nearly driven crazy with them. We have to cover our faces with mosquito netting in order to rest at all."(Rendell 1903)

Mrs. St. John claimed the year 1902 was the "mosquito plague" year in Saskatchewan. She described the conditions and how they affected their work, and the practice of "smudging" or burning manure, which was the only way to give livestock some relief from the insects:

> There has descended upon us, like a bolt from a clear sky, the plague of pioneers - Mosquitoes. Never before has anything equalled it. There has been an absence of prairie fires for a number of years causing a heavy growth of old grass, this with present rains provide ideal conditions for these demons of torture, which cover the horses so completely it is impossible to tell, at a distance, the colour of the animals. We are compelled to keep a continuous smudge for the stock. As for ourselves, we have been compelled to cover the shacks with tar paper, fill all the crevices with mud and wear veils of netting at all hours. They relent somewhat from two to four in the morning and that is the only time we can work the horses in the field. All our breaking is done by moonlight. (St. John 1902)

The natural elements in all their extremes and variety made a good solid house the most coveted possession on the prairies. After the initial shock some women experienced when they saw their future home for the first time, women rolled up their sleeves to make their dugout, shack or soddy[2] and sometimes, at first, their tent, as livable and comfortable as possible. Women's writings tell us how important this home-making was to their identity, and to their spirits. And it was not an easy task. As Mrs. Sparks wrote about her nearest woman neighbour "She came to a dug out and kept it as neat as a pin as long as she lived in it . . . . How nice she had her home. . . . I can tell you it is true greatness to live in a dugout and make it look like home." (Sparks circa 1912)

Herein lay a problem for women who migrated to the Canadian west. They had a definite idea about how a home "should" look, based on the homes they had come from, and at the same time there was no possibility their home on the prairies could ever measure up to those standards. So we see in women's writings a continual frustration and longing about their inability to reproduce what they consider a "home".

> The log house still is not cheerful inside, or, for that matter, even cosy. We are so very crowded, and things are in confusion, piled around on top of each other, and life is still more like camping than living. Gives me a constant feeling of frustration. In fall there never seems to be enough time to make the house

> more comfortable, and when winter comes the cold comes in at the cracks inadequately plastered with mud. I've improved the appearance some by whitewashing the inside of the walls, but the floor is uneven, with cracks, and the roof is an eye sore if I ever saw one. . . . But those streams of water that time opened up several places in the roof where the dust still sifts through. It's pretty terrible for one who likes things clean and tidy.
>
> (Mary Tennis circa 1929)

> Everything at sixes and sevens - the men put up shelves for me that look like ghosts of the real thing. They were the last straw today - when I saw them I "smiled and smiled and was a villain"- said "Thank you. They're very nice. - and went and wept - my first weep since I left home - am in despair over this wretched old cabin - It is a dirty horrible old rookery.
>
> (Mary Inderwick 1884)

Most women recognized the limitations of their environment, and of their incomes, and became obsessed with cleanliness and neatness as a measure of their success as homemakers. This engaged them in a never ending war with the elements and with the nature of their home - sod roofs leaked mud when it rained, sod walls provided refuge for rodents, dust blew through the cracks of wooden shacks, and dirt floors and walls provided a unique challenge both in cleanliness and aesthetics. Wood frame houses, with finished walls and floors, were most desired because they were like the homes most migrants had come from, and were easiest to clean and decorate. They were not necessarily warmer in winter however. Alice Self wrote about her good fortune to come to a stone house her husband had built before her arrival, so that she "didn't suffer like some did" during the long cold winters.(Self 1912) Of the permanent family homes built, hers was the only stone house among predominantly wooden shacks and some frame houses, in this group of women.

For a significant number of women their first home on their homestead was a tent. Most families were able to move from tents to warmer and sturdier quarters when the snow came. Sometimes the cabin simply was not ready soon enough and it meant great hardship for the whole family, as Hilda Rose described:

> A tent is such a draughty place to live in, when it gets forty degrees below zero. We put on all the clothes we had. And say how we did eat. Five and six meals in twenty-four hours, and still we lost flesh. The cold just seemed to freeze the meat off your bones. (Rose 1926, 118)

After temporary quarters in tents or one ply shacks, the new sturdy shack was appreciated from a new perspective:

> I shall be so thankful when the warmer weather sets in. I can quite understand the charms of camping then but under present circumstances it has very few charms I can assure you, what with the bitter cold and hard ground we don't get much refreshing rest . . . [later] Time flies even in camp life which thank goodness terminates today, for this afternoon we contemplate moving up to "Doris Court" and sleep tonight for the first time for four months within shelter of four walls. July is the rainy month here and when the rain does come down it is like a deluge. Imagine the delights of being aroused from your slumbers night after night by the rain trickling down on you and as a rule it has a nasty habit of drifting just the very side of the tent you happen to be lying. I can assure you we have found it awfully trying . . . . We have really removed to our very own domicile and right proud we are to look around, even though it be on bare boards, and feel it is indeed our own home. All the merry "treking" at an end. . . . There is certainly a great charm and fascination in planning it all out knowing that it is our own property. I often say it compensates one largely for all the hardships we have passed through. (Alice Rendell 1903)

> We started out in October . . . while our house was being built we lived in a tent. And I must say it was not particularly pleasant, as every night a little snow fell, causing the tent to sag in folds, and then when I cooked the meals the snow would melt and drip through, I had to keep my cap, coat and overshoes on most of the time. Before my husband got our log house finished the mud would freeze to his hands while plastering it, when we moved in I felt I was in a mansion, if only big enough for two. (Buchanan 1883)

Although log houses were common, homes built of planed wood were preferred. The effort and expense required to build a house out of wood on the prairies was significant. Lumber and other supplies had to be hauled, sometimes from great distances, and for many homesteaders, their prairie shack would be the first home they had ever attempted to build.

> There were my husband, four children and myself . . . needless to say we had no rooms to let. There was no floor but Mother Earth and to make matters worse, our neighbour, a bachelor, who had the true western spirit of using whatever happens in his way, and being in need of a stable, used our shack for one that winter. This did not improve matters, especially the odour. We cleaned it out good and got settled down for the night when Oh horrors a mouse ran over us. The way my head went under the covers wasn't slow. . . . We slept in a tent until we got another house built. My husband drew the lumber, sixty-five miles with open wagon, taking five days for the round trip. (Clarissa Althouse 1907)

> Everybody has a log house here. There are lots of poplar logs. That is what our house is made of. . . . Our house is just plugged up with green moss that grows in swamps and it is warm as can be. . . . We just have a dirt roof on our house. It isn't the nicest kind of a roof but it is warm and doesn't look too bad. Most people have them. They are less expensive. Lumber is high here. If we could get a saw mill here we would do well I believe. (Gertrude Chase 1918)

For Mary Lawrence's family, who lost their first comfortable home in a fire, it was a huge undertaking to travel south from Fort Vermilion to get the materials needed to replace their temporary dwelling:

> With four babies now, life in the small log shack was neither comfortable nor healthy and Fred felt he must go outside again that winter to get materials for a better home. Nails and tools and many other necessary supplies were not to be bought in the North. (Lawrence 1903, 193)

Mary Lawrence lost a ten pound newborn son two days after his arrival because of the cold draughts in her rough and unfinished temporary log home. Edith Lawry's home, a house made of green lumber, was insufficient for the cold prairie winter:

> and there were spaces like this . . . the blankets were frozen, in the winter that is. And the bread was frozen. We had to thaw it before we ate it . . . the first winter was so cold and that was just the house with the single boards, it was so cold that the fine English china it froze. It was so cold when I put on the heater in the morning or my husband did to warm the house up the poor china cups split. We'd hear ping! That would be another cup. (Lawry 1919)

Sometimes lack of money and time meant that the house would not be ready for the first winter. Mrs. St. John recorded in her diary that their shack took a year and a half to build, as she and her husband did it themselves and they could only buy "a little lumber at a time". Even then it proved inadequate for cold weather, as she wrote during a blizzard "in the evening put paper on the inside of the shack, which is constructed of only one thickness of shiplap lumber and the heat from the cookstove increases the size of the cracks every day; if it keeps on, it will soon be all cracks."(St. John 1904)

A sense of permanency was important to creating a feeling of home, and as Elone Stobaugh wrote, even the simplest improvement would help to create this feeling. After two years of living in a tent, the mill bunkhouse, and temporary shacks, her need for a feeling of being settled is understandable:

> Worst of all I thought he [the dog] had torn my lovely lace curtains. They were the first curtains I had put up since going to Canada. To me they meant home and permanency. This, however, was not as I thought. Verne had decide that without water it was useless to stay there and decided to move. . . . We had our original dwelling of six by six logs. It wasn't much trouble to tear it down and move to the new location. (Stobaugh 1931)

For some women, itinerant living was the norm for part of the year. Catharine Neil described the two alternate homes she had in addition to her ranch home:

> The first four years of my married life were spent between my home and the camp. As July came round I prepared for my summer vacation in the camp wagon, living the life of a travelling gypsy. . . . As lambing time came around each year we would move the sheep and lambs to the new camp located 12 miles south and I cooked for the men. We moved part of the house from the script land and it acted as a kitchen and bedroom. It was built with single boards outside and no lining inside and when it rained we had almost as much water inside as outside. In the moving of it the floor got sagged and the doors didn't fit very well but it was only for one month each year so I put up with it for a number of years . . . the rain would run down the stovepipe and put the fire out and nothing was ever done to remedy it, for every year was to be the last. So I had to grin and bear it. (Neil 1905-1909)

Many women missed the conveniences of electric light and plumbing because they had lived with them before they came to the prairies. "But there are times when I wish we lived in a place where there are a few conveniences, particularly the electric light" wrote Monica Hopkins. (Hopkins 1911) And Esme Tuck provided an incomparable description of the relationship between plumbing and marital commitment in the life of a homestead woman:

> Plumbing was of course a pipe dream but we did very well without it. . . . Plumbing and pioneering are at opposite ends of the poles of human existence . . . our sentry box (outhouse) had no door. Fortunately none was needed for lumber was scarce and high-priced. . . . But in winter all things change. . . . The 'House of Necessity' . . . became a house of torture. Oh, the bitter bitter cold. 10 20 30 40 below. No matter. Well fortified against the weather I would charge headlong through the snow, clutching a hot water bottle under my parka, one big protest against inexorable nature. . . . Everything was covered with frost. One was assaulted above and below. Was it tough? It was. For better, for worse, says the marriage service. "Could be this sort of thing was what was meant" said I to myself. (Tuck 1921,197)

For some women, a real hardship was the crowded conditions in which they lived. Dwellings were small because building supplies were so dear, and fuel for heating scarce or expensive. Many women suffered for the lack of privacy created by the requirement to share their shack, which was often just one big room, with hired men, or neighbours. Shortly after her seventh child was born, Mrs. Cayford's neighbours from her previous farm location arrived to share for the winter the rude shack the Cayfords had built on their new homestead. "We were very crowded indeed" Mrs. Cayford wrote "but not uncomfortable". (Cayford 1904) After spending her first few months on her homestead living in a dugout with a leaky roof, one small window and a tarpaulin for a door, and sleeping in tents, the new shack must have indeed felt comfortable, even shared with another family.

Lillian Turner described her house of sixteen by eighteen feet as "a fairly good size and lots better than hundreds of people here are living in." (Turner 1906) Her assessment, based on other women's writings, is accurate. Most homestead shacks were small, some as small as eight feet by ten feet. Despite the fact that they could not afford the materials to make their shack warm enough for winter, and that she was experiencing a "seige with mice", Lillian Turner's main complaint was her lack of privacy in her one room house. She hung a curtain made out of a sheet in front of her bed to remedy the situation when hired men, other homesteaders or travellers shared their shack at night. She wrote about her feelings as she dealt with the succession of men who bunk in with them for months at a time:

> Sime is still here and as far as I can see no signs of him going. I don't know if it is right of me to feel so, but I can hardly wait for him to go. And he will no sooner go than Ora B. will be here. It isn't the work; I don't mind that, but I don't have anything private. You can imagine how we are packed in when the whole house is smaller than the dining room at home. The foot of Sime's bed and ours is separated by the sewing machine and a curtain. (Turner 1907)

Lillian Turner and her husband, as well as the Neville family, solved the problem of a homestead shack unfit for the first winter by moving into better accommodations in town, returning to the homestead in the spring.

Women put significant effort into making their homes as attractive and comfortable as possible. Old and new skills were employed in plastering, painting, wallpapering, carpentry, upholstery, rug-making and sewing. Wedding presents and other things like pictures, books, dishes and ornaments brought from home - usually by the woman of the family - made bare shacks more home-like. As Esme Tuck wrote, "This bit of culture [a persian rug], plus the coffee pot, plus my wedding presents, lifted us right out of our world". (Tuck 1919,13) Women had to be innovative in their home improvements. A scarcity of lumber led Maria Potter to create bedroom partitions out of newspaper; because she could not afford plaster, Margaret Shaw bought fifty yards of unbleached cotton to cover the walls of her sitting room, stretching it tight and pasting wallpaper on top of it. Mary Inderwick also covered her walls and ceilings with cotton to produced a more finished look to her ranch home. Mrs. Stedman papered her walls with her husband's used London Daily News, with the pictures carefully arranged with a view to artistry. "Our neighbours used to come in and see our picture gallery. When these were dirty we put others on." (Stedman 1885) To seal their houses for winter when plaster wasn't available, women stuffed the cracks with paper and rags, and plastered the outside with mud. Most important to the women was to have a home that was "very clean and scrubbed and comfortable" (Emma Richards 1906) even if it was without floors and had the simplest of furnishings.

The location of the home determined the difficulties women would face in carrying out some of their household duties and in feeling safe and secure. As Emma Richards wrote about their piece of land "of course it didn't have water, a house, fence or anything. Just the bald-headed prairie. You could see for hundreds of miles." (Richards 1906) Water was essential for survival and many families experienced real hardship as they struggled to maintain a potable and plentiful enough supply of water. "Our slough goes dry. I take team and two barrels on a stone boat and go three miles for water" Mrs. St. John wrote in her diary. (St.John 1903) Many families had to rely on slough water for at least part of their homestead years, until a well could be dug. In winter wells would freeze and snow had to be melted to provide water, a huge task when it involved water for livestock as well as for household use. If slough water was unacceptable or the slough dried up, a long walk or ride to a neighbour's well was the only resource. Mrs. Watson, with a family of eight to

feed and wash, wrote in her memoirs "there was no well on our farm so we had to walk one-half mile for our drinking water or we had the option of drinking slough water. The latter was chosen because if we went to a well we had to walk and carry the water, and as this was hard to do, we were satisfied to use the slough water". (Watson 1905) Slough water had to be strained through a cloth, usually a cheesecloth to rid it of the "wigglies" and other living things found in it. As Catharine Neil wrote, this was "anything but nice". She also had to be quick about drawing her slough water each morning in camp, before the sheep broke camp and dirtied the water. (Neil 1905) Well water was marginally better than that found in the sloughs, but it was greatly appreciated:

> What a joy it was to drink the hard alkaline water after the green slough water which was alive with wiggly worms. We must have been tough or we would have died of dysentry.[sic] (Holmes 1922)

Wells were expensive to dig, and often produced limited supply or none at all. Alice Rendell wrote "The worst feature we have had to contend with is want of water. We have had two wells sunk close to the house but up to now have not been successful in striking water. . . . We use nothing else but melted snow for washing and cooking." (Rendell 1903) Mrs. Stedman recalled that in her ranching days, water had to be hauled in carts from the river and brought into the kitchens. In winter when the door had to be open to fill the kitchen water barrels, the kitchen floor was transformed into a sheet of ice and her house plants were frozen. Washing hair and bathing became luxuries because of limited water supplies. Lillian Turner wrote to her mother about her first hair wash after her arrival. It was a significant event because she has had to wait until a hard rain to get sufficient water to do it, and as she wrote "I so seldom get any rainwater." (Turner 1906) For many families, substantial effort and time were invested in maintaining a water supply, and prairie homesteads were not often blessed with a natural source. "The big drawback to our location was lack of water" wrote Elone Stobaugh. "We collected it in barrels when it rained. This was used in the house. Water for the stock had to be hauled." (Stobaugh 1930)

Both the economic circumstances of families setting up homesteads, and their long distances from trading centres made food preparation a real challenge for some women. Gardens were not always productive the first few summers on the prairies, as Elone Stobaugh wrote of her first summer:

> That was a hard summer for us. Food was not plentiful. We had little money to buy. The cow dried up. Our garden on newly plowed ground did not produce as we had hoped. We had no meat or fruit but lived on bread and potatoes, carrots and lettuce. We all lost weight. I lost at least 25 - 30 pounds. (Stobaugh 1929)

Many women shared accounts about the lack of variety in their diets and the difficulties they experienced in getting groceries. Monica Hopkins complained about the meat always being salted beef, and Evelyn Springett also wrote that she "got terribly tired of beef in any form." (Springett 1895,104) As ranch women, Hopkins and Springett would have the opportunity to get tired of beef, while some farm women found meat in scarce supply in some seasons of the year, and craved it. Even then, without refrigeration, beef had to be consumed right away or salted, and so the treats of fresh meat were often months apart, as Eliza Brown, another rancher, showed in her diary.

Springett also wrote that "fresh fruit and vegetables were almost unknown, and a single orange might cost as much as twenty-five cents". (Springett 1895, 104) For many women the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables was a particular loss, as Maria Potter wrote "fruit was really a luxury, being used only as a special Sunday night treat for many years. This was somewhat of a hardship for one who had been used to having fruit trees of many kinds growing right by the house." (Potter 1884-) And Barbara Slater wrote to a friend :

> We have been feasting on fresh meat lately, the first we have had for months. . . . Your mention of plums made my mouth water, I haven't seen one even - have had one apple, and some strawberries, and one string of white currants!! That's my record for the summer in the fresh fruit line. (Slater 1912)

The distance to trading centres meant that supplies often had to be freighted in large quantities. One hundred pound bags of flour and sugar, and five pound bags of baking soda were not uncommon. Mrs. Cayford claimed that despite the fact they had milk, butter and eggs, "many times we found ourselves hard pressed for bodily needs."(Cayford

1902-22) Margaret Smith remembered how difficult it was to adjust to the limited food supply on the prairies: "We had a tough time of it coming from a city like Edinburgh where we had all we could eat."(Smith 1906) Catharine Neil, like many other farm and ranch wives, did not get to choose her own food supplies, particularly at camp in the summer, when supplies were brought out to them once a week. She described their camp diet as "plenty of salt pork and beans and I often longed for fruit and vegetables. But there was nothing of that kind to be had, so I had to keep on wishing". (Neil 1905-)

For many homesteading families it truly was a hand to mouth existence. As Gertrude Chase wrote to her mother "We got a little money through threshing and that keeps us in flour etc., this winter along with what potatoes and garden stuff we raised and some moose meat." (Chase 1919) And Lillian Turner described her food shortage also in a letter home to her mother: "We are having rather slim rations just now. No milk, no eggs, and just old potatoes for dinner tomorrow. I am afraid we will have to take oatmeal and pork three times a day. I will have three extra men to dinner too, while the hay lasts. I make dandy bread, so we won't starve." (Turner 1906)

Isolation and communication

There are two types of isolation experienced by homesteading families on the prairies. One is geographic isolation which describes the distance from needed services, such as medical care, education, church services, railroads and stores. The second is social isolation, which is not necessarily a function of geographic distance but certainly can be caused by it. Social isolation comes in many forms. Homestead women experienced profound loneliness because they did not see other women for months at a time. They also missed family members and friends whom they had left behind. They dreamt about the benefits of a society they once lived in: music, theatre, parties, libraries, churches and schools. Some also felt socially alien in a culture vastly different from their home culture.

And they faced crises without the benefit of the support of friends and family, or even a good friend in whom to confide.

Women appear to have done a substantial portion of the work required to keep families connected to their kin and former friends. The importance of these communications to the family and to the women themselves is demonstrated in tangible ways through the procurement of needed goods and luxury items not available on the prairies. It is also evident that these communications contributed to the maintenance of emotional and mental health for many women who felt cut off from society on their homesteads. Women also responded and reached out to other women on the prairies. Through the shared experiences of childbirth, death of a family member, assistance at threshing time, or social gatherings, women connected to other women, and in doing so, bettered the lives of all family members.

Most frequently mentioned concerns about geographic isolation related to the family's needs for medical care. Childbirth, of course, was one of those times of need, and it will be discussed in more detail in the next section. But it was at times of crisis that the distance from towns and cities with doctors, nurses, hospitals and dentists was most keenly felt. As time passed and the provinces became more populated, the availability of health care professionals improved. The northern parts of the provinces benefited from provincial and federal government medical schemes, including the Soldier Settlement Board, which placed nurses in some of the northern districts in the 1920's. Mrs. Duthie reported that in 1884, the closest doctor was forty miles away, at Fort MacLeod. Distances of forty or fifty miles to medical services were not uncommon throughout most of the settlement period. Homesteading women who were trained nurses soon found themselves pressed into service by neighbours far and near, many of whom felt "safer" with trained medical personnel in the district. Margaret Thompson was one of these volunteer professionals, and she wrote "It would have been unheard of to refuse an appeal for help. My husband resented the idea of having his wife called away, but he understood that it was unavoidable." (Thompson 1919-1930) Homesteaders drove from as far away as thirty miles to solicit her help, and she found herself not only providing nursing care, but also undertaker's duties. Lena Kernen Bacon also found her nurses' training put to good use

for her neighbours' benefit, as the nearest doctor was thirty miles away. She wrote in her memoirs "When people learned about my experiences they often urged me to return to the States where nursing was so much easier, but I felt that this was just the place a real nurse was needed." (Bacon 1904-1908)

The cost of a doctor's visit was prohibitive because of the travel involved. Most doctors had a fee that combined a flat rate and a per mile charge. For a fifteen mile trip from Milestone, a doctor charged the St. John family twelve dollars, a huge sum to a homesteading family. In this particular case, the doctor rode the train to the station nearest the homestead, and was driven home by the hired man. Beatrice Whitehair explained "Well I had to once [call a doctor] and it's a dollar a mile. And we were twelve miles out. So you see you don't fetch the doctor. And when my daughter had pneumonia with measles oh, it was terrible. That was the only time I loathed the farm because no one came they were so afraid of the measles." (Whitehair 1911) Even in the 1920's, in northern Alberta, Peggy Holmes described the high cost of care "It cost a dollar a mile and ten dollars a visit for a doctor to come from the nearest point, which was thirty-five miles away. We couldn't afford forty-five dollars for that kind of treatment." (Holmes 1922) The vulnerability of homesteaders in medical emergencies is described by Harriet Neville in her memoirs: "For many years there was no doctor nearer than Regina, twenty miles from us and farther from many more settlers. There were no trained nurses in the country at all. Telephones were not installed anywhere, and no farmer had fast horses." (Neville 1883-1914) Long distances also meant doctors were delayed in reaching the sick, and as homesteaders held out until the last possible moment to summon help, this delay could have dire consequences.

> The nearest doctor was at Langenburg, some forty-five miles away. The question of the moment was how to get word to him. We had one neighbour who owned a pony and buckboard and we decided we must ask him for assistance. He lived about three miles to the west of us. . . . When I reached our corral fence I was almost too exhausted to crawl through. . . . While Johnnie slept, I went out and did the chores and just as I had finished and was on my way to the house Mr. Beck drove past on his way to Langenburg, for the doctor. . . . At about nine o'clock the next morning the doctor arrived.
> (Ellen Lowes 1883)

Bad weather resulted in tragic outcomes for families seeking medical services.

> Well it [the baby] got pneumonia and the roads were blocked and we couldn't get no doctor. The doctor couldn't come out. And so we phoned for an airplane and the plane got no space to land out there. It was snow. So he just had pneumonia and passed away. . . . The same year my baby died there were four others, just at the same time, of pneumonia, and in the cemetery in one row. It was just one after another.
>
> (Magdalena Zeidler 1910-)

Homesteader's vulnerability increased as towns became more prosperous, for doctors began to refuse home visits, so long trips by those requiring care became necessary. As Mary Dawes recalled "And since I've been up on this farm you couldn't get a doctor to you and we only had the car, the only car on the farm, when anybody was sick they used to run down with the wagon, Mr. Dawes come, dad's sick, mother's sick, mom's going to have a baby. And me and my husband would rush them into Radway hospital." (Dawes 1910 -) Kaja Froyen described her experience with remedying a bad toothache in the winter of 1911. "The nearest dentist was at Camrose 40 miles away. We had to get there but how I dreaded that trip. The dentist didn't inject anything, and how it did hurt." (Froyen 1911) After a worrisome night watching over her ill husband Monica Hopkins wrote: "do you wonder that I would like to have a hospital, doctor and drugstore at the corners of our land?" (Hopkins 1910, 131)

The second most urgent need of homestead families affected by geographic isolation was for schools for their children. The fact that women had to add their children's educational needs to their daily work load has already been discussed. There were other solutions to this problem. Gertrude Chase wrote about her family's seasonal moves from the homestead to a temporary home close to a school, and expressed her wish that they never had to move for this purpose: it was "a nuisance". (Chase 1920) Other homestead families in this group also decided to move closer to schools as their children became school age. Sometimes this involved seasonal changes in place of residence, and occasionally families left the farm or ranch permanently to live in a town where schools were available. Mrs. Duthie was one of the early ranchers in Southern Alberta. She claimed that the earliest cattlemen opposed the formation of school districts, that they did

not women and children to settle on the prairie, because their large tracts of ranch land would be heavily taxed for the support of schools. Mrs. Duthie also stated that:

> Life was very lonely for many women. Cultured women saw their children growing up without getting the things they should have. This was a constant source of worry. The children seldom realized what they were missing. They were content with the freedom and the lack of convention.(Duthie 1884-)

Homesteading women's accounts are diverse in their descriptions of social life on the prairies. Time of settlement determined to some extent the social isolation and feelings of loneliness experienced by women. Lena Kernen Bacon is a good example. She wrote upon her arrival that she was the only living soul to be found on the forty miles of prairie between her homestead and the town of Moose Jaw. Two years later, she was surrounded by neighbours on all sides, enough to start organizing a small school. Proximity to an established trading centre also influenced feelings of social isolation. The diary of Sophie Puckette describes daily trips into town by Sophie and her sisters, because it was within walking distance. These trips would be for commercial or social reasons, and Puckette's diary is full of descriptions of social encounters and planned social activities that result from easy access to other people. Being close to town, the Puckette homestead was also visited frequently by many people paying social calls as well as transacting various business affairs of homesteading. Long distances to towns and cities seemed to shrink in women's minds as they became more accustomed to homestead life and more self-reliant. Ellen Lowes wrote about her change in attitude that made the fifty mile drive from her ranch to Yorkton no longer a barrier, but an easy drive she would do alone in her buggy; and the seven miles distance to the closest neighbour, which at first she considered the only drawback to her location, seemed "not so far as three had at one time". (Lowes 1897) Long distances to neighbouring farms and to the nearest towns were also altered as areas became more populated and more towns were established. Often the completion of a railway link was a factor in bringing more people to an area.

> Here we were 80 miles from a post office and our mail was brought in by hunters or anyone travelling in our direction. Our nearest neighbour was four miles to the south, nearest to the east twenty miles, to the West 45 miles, and no one to the north that we were aware of except Indians. We got our supplies

> twice a year, the trip taking a week. . . . For nine months I did not see a white woman, although I did see an Indian woman, but she could not speak English so I was very glad when later some English speaking families moved in. . . . In 1905 the Canadian Northern Railway was built. The nearest station about three miles from our house was called Buchanan in our honour, and very soon a town by that name sprang up and very soon we had a daily train and mail service.
>
> (Buchanan 1883-1905)

The most difficult aspects of homestead life for most women were the lack of female companionship and the loss of regular contact with families of origin. The loneliness that resulted from these social changes in women's lives was deeply felt, and unabashedly shared in women's stories. To understand the nature of this loneliness, it is important to know that some women never left the homestead for months at a time, and many never saw another woman for months, or even years. Women who had neighbours never got to know them, and it had nothing to do with geographical distance. Gertrude Chase wrote in a letter home in February 1922 that she had seen no women since fall and that she hadn't been off the homestead for over a year. Her nearest neighbour was three miles away. She commented "I don't know just what to think about it. I can't say I like to live that way." (Chase 1922) Lillian Turner wrote to her mother about the possibility of moving to town for winter: "If I do not go out now it will be more than a year before I get another chance likely, and I am not sure I could stand it that long. . . . I have not been any place but church for a long time and a woman hardly ever finds her way back here." (Turner 1906) On another occasion, she wrote "It is quite lonesome back here sometimes. I notice it more since Rose has been here. She is the only woman that has been here since I came." (Turner 1907) Hilda Rose lived in a more isolated situation than most homesteaders. She expressed her feelings with her usual candour: "You know it takes some mental calibre to come in here and live alone and not see a white woman more than twice a year. If you haven't got much in your head the lonesomeness will get you." (Rose 1926,125)

Every letter that Lillian Turner wrote she mentioned her homesickness and how much she missed her family. Women expressed a longing to have their parents see their new grandchildren, and described "spells of nostalgia for the bright lights, relatives and

friends". (Margaret Thompson 1919-1930) Mary Edey characterized her loneliness for her family as "terrible, just terrible", because she left behind a large family and extended family that socialized daily and she was "used to a crowd around all the time". (Edey 1914)

A few women claimed they never had time to be lonely. They were too busy with household duties, the care of children, their sewing, knitting and mending. Certainly for women who brought their children with them to the prairies, life was very full, and children provided some companionship. But for new brides the first few years of homesteading were lonesome ones. Unless within walking distance even neighbours could not be seen on a regular basis, and men were frequently absent, leaving women completely alone on homesteads. And men were not often cognizant of the effect these situations would have on women, nor considerate of their needs while doing the family business in town. Harriet Neville had some strong feelings about this situation:

> I have sometimes thought that these very circumstance helped to fill our mental hospitals. Some of the men whom we have thought the very best, would not try to buy a small article for their wives thinking it was too trivial for a grown man. This sort of thing and our prairie farms being so large, neighbours being so far apart and making women so isolated, is one great danger in prairie life. Having my children with me, my husband being the first magistrate appointed, and for so many years having the Post Office, helped me very much. I was never lonely. There was always something of interest either within our home or brought there from others.(Neville 1883-1914)

Neville claimed that her lack of female company made her feel embarrassed when a woman did come to her home: "why I could scarcely set a table". (Neville 1883-1914) Because opportunities to be with other women were few and infrequent, women savoured them, and found themselves renewed by them. Monica Hopkins described her enjoyment of women's talk and her need for women's company on two occasions:

> Margot and I had a lovely day together. We talked woman's talk for hours, not one mention of horses or cows or crops or hay. . . . I insisted on going. I knew that if we went far enough we should come to the place of some friends of his, where there were some women and I did so want to see a member of my own sex - I'm tired of undiluted mankind. (Hopkins 1909-1911)

Mrs. Cayford described the isolation she faced on her first homestead and the difference having just one woman "neighbour" could make:

> A year had passed and I had not looked upon the face of a white woman since I came. Cowboys, ranchers galore came to talk and to fill their empty stomachs, but not a woman dawned on my horizon till my little Irish neighbour . . . who was to live eight miles up the river with her big husband and three small children! I shall never forget the joy of seeing a white woman's face again. Upon my asking her what we were going to do if we needed a doctor, she laughed and said "Sure we'll have to dope each other" which we did on more than one occasion. (Cayford 1904)

Letter writing was a partial solution, and often the only one available, to overcome feelings of isolation and of loneliness. The post office was the most revered public institution in early prairie life. It was the lifeline to civilization. It was affirmation that all women valued and knew still existed somewhere, and that what they were doing where they were now also mattered. Some women write more about the postal service in their letters and diaries than they do about themselves or their children. The post office was the source of packages from home, of letters from friends and family, and equally important, of newspapers and magazines from home, from major world centres and from prairie cities. "The mail is such an important part of my existence that the very thought of losing part of it is most upsetting" wrote Monica Hopkins. (Hopkins 1909) "Our isolated existence made the arrival of letters from home a welcome event and one which helped to break the monotony of the day's routine" Evelyn Springett recollected. (Springett, 1893-1903) Sarah Roberts found letters essential to her mental health, particularly when winter arrived:

> I greatly doubt if we could have endured the isolation and loneliness this winter if it had not been for the many good letters from our loved ones. They have given us courage and faith and have helped us hold firmly to our resolution to see this thing through. . . . Certainly, since winter set in, life has been very monotonous, as I have been able to get out of the house so seldom . . . this weather and being cut off from everybody is almost too much for me. Sometimes, like today and yesterday, I just think I cannot endure it any longer. . . . There have been few days so far this winter when I could get out of the house, and there were times when I thought that I could not endure the close confinement any longer. (Roberts 1907, 96, 79)

Many women did feel as though they had entered a life cut off from the rest of the world, and particularly the corner of the world they knew best.

> You cannot have the least idea how we long for news and some papers, any literature would be so gratefully received . . . it is hard for you in the old country surrounded by every comfort and luxury to realize in the smallest degree what we have all put through the two years in comparative isolation. Sometimes without the slightest idea of what was going on in the outside world for a fortnight or three weeks together.
>
> (Alice Rendell 1903)

> I longed for a renewal of old interests - painting and music and books; for the sight and sound of old friends. Letters and newspaper reached us once a week only, and not infrequently in the rough winter weather it was impossible to drive the 20 miles to fetch them, which almost amounted to a tragedy of disappointment!
>
> (Hilda Kirkland 1885-1905)

Hilda Rose is dependent on the books and paper she receives through the mail to keep herself healthy. "The books and papers help me so. I am learning the poetry and a book is always propped up on the table where I work. I am having a mental bath, washing away the bitterness and lonesomeness. I feel so happy all day long now." (Rose,1927) For Peggy Holmes, the mail from home was as much a trial as a comfort:

> During this time I was getting mail from home telling me about the family parties, theatres, etc. Still suffering from homesickness, these letters did little to comfort me. . . . I always looked forward to news from home. . . . It was all meant to cheer me up, but my family's well-meaning efforts often plunged me into the depths of despair and homesickness. . . . I must go back to England I thought. This isolation is too much for me. I tugged at my hair and was ready to scream again but managed to control myself. The tiny shack seemed to close in on me. . . . The loneliness was unbearable. (Holmes 1922, 107, 147, 150)

Mary Tennis wrote letters to her former nursing colleague on a regular basis. The act of writing and explaining her life circumstances seemed a tonic to her doubts and fears, and she relied on her friend's replies for a connection to a life that was once familiar. "Do let me hear from you Patsy, whenever you feel the urge to write. I so often feel that my sanity depends on my keeping contact, through correspondence, with someone from a different life." (Tennis 1926-1930) For women who were constantly busy producing the means for survival, the number of letters they would write in a week to family and friends is surprising. If the purpose of writing is considered, it is understandable. The process of

writing was cathartic and allowed women an outlet for feelings they felt they could not share with their husbands and children. Letter writing was for many a daily activity and for most at least a weekly undertaking. Several women noted that it was an exception to have a period as long as ten days or two weeks between their letters home to their families. The amount of detail about daily life in some letters is also remarkable, although letters tended to become more cryptic as the years passed. There are significant differences between both the amount of letters women wrote, compared to their husbands, and the amount they received. Women were the communicators in most of the families, and it was a task that despite the time and effort it took, held its own reward. In several families, letters between husband and wife were important to maintaining family life and conducting family business while the man lived away from the homestead. Amelia Lucas maintained a steady correspondence with her husband while he was away proving up his script land. And letters and parcels from families were the source of needed and luxury items, occasionally money, and most important, reading material. "My folks were awfully good to me. They'd send me parcels. When the children were babies they sent me all baby clothes and then my mother would make little suits for the boys as they got bigger . . . Sometimes they'd stick in a magazine or a book" (Mary Edey 1914). And Mabel Hawthorne, who described her nearest post office at Saskatoon as "sixty miles by trail" and that her family "just had to take chances on getting our mail through our neighbours and friends" wrote "And oh those letters! Did we not appreciate them? How we did enjoy a letter from home and a plum pudding at Christmas and many other goodies which helped to brighten the days".(Hawthorne 1906)

Mail service was not always regular, or reliable, and families were hampered by bad weather, especially in winter, from retrieving it from the nearest post office, which could be as far as one hundred miles away. Margaret Smith recalled once receiving her Christmas mail in June of the following year. For women like Hilda Rose, in remote northern locations, mail was an unreliable lifeline:

> That mail certainly worries everybody. Why, we had only three mails in eight months. And I mail my letters with any pair of moccasins that happens by, whether going or coming. Their fate is then in the lap of the gods. . . . I went after my mail for the first time last week, thirty-eight miles or more, and it was sure nice to get out. (Rose 1927, 145, 155)

When post offices were established closer to home, it was a cause for celebration. "For us, to go only four miles instead of eighteen to post a letter or to get one was luxury indeed" wrote Clara Middleton. And Edna Banks recollected the day the postal service improved in her district:

> In the late summer of 1912, we had another red-letter day. This was the ultimate, and almost took my mental outlook out of the pioneering era. Our mail service was unsatisfactory ever since we landed on the homestead in the winter of 1911, and we only received mail when we or one of the neighbours went out to Morse for supplies and picked it up for us. Sometimes it was several weeks between mails. When we learned there was going to be a regular weekly mail service and that a Post Office was going to be set up in the home of a homesteader who lived near the schoolhouse, about a distance of seven miles from our place, we were all excited. It was almost too good to be true. The mail was to be brought in from Swift Current, a distance of 65 miles, every Saturday morning. Wilf was as pleased as I was and declared Saturday afternoon a half holiday on our farm for man and beast. (Banks 1912)

Only two women enjoyed the luxury of a telephone before their homesteading days were over. Clara Middleton described the significant changes telephone service brought to women on prairie farms:

> More wonderful still, a telephone exchange was established and rural lines radiated from it. Isolation was ended. Instead of talking to the neighbours perhaps twice a month we could speak to them, or they to us, at any moment of the day or night. And the instrument was used! Some good women, hungry for speech, would listen in, whether called or not. . . . Political or other meetings could be arranged in five minutes. Long preparations for social gatherings was no longer necessary. (Middleton 1947, 53)

Clara also indicated that the automobile, when it became the standard mode of transportation, made a huge difference in farm women's lives, because it served to "close up distance like a concertina". (Middleton 1947, 53) Isolation, both geographic and social, were part of homestead life on the prairies. Women of the first generation of homesteaders were deeply affected by their isolation and expended considerable effort in coping strategies to overcome it. This way of life was historically specific to this time and place on the prairies. The installation of telephone lines, the introduction of automobiles, and the purchase of radios greatly altered the feelings of isolation women experienced, as well as

making it easier to overcome distances between neighbours and communities. It is interesting to note that of all aspects of homestead life, the historical experience of social isolation has survived as a feature of the modern mythology of farm women's lives.[2] While it may no longer be true of the farming lifestyle today, or for even the latter half of this century, it was a difficult and unforgettable part of life on homesteads for many women of the first generation.

Pregnancy, childbirth and midwifery

Perhaps the most poignant examples of homestead women being challenged by their isolation emerge in their pregnancy and childbirth stories. Many women were surprisingly descriptive about their birth experiences and about their preparations, both psychological and practical, for bringing children safely into the world. Pregnancies, however, were less frequently mentioned. This was a generation or two that maintained a veil of privacy around pregnancy, but acknowledged birth as the social event that it, of necessity, had become. Gertrude Chase did not even tell her own mother about her pregnancies in her letters home, and mentioned the children only after they have been born. There is a real difference between educated women and uneducated women in attitudes towards and sharing of pregnancy and childbirth accounts. Educated women were much more comfortable discussing their pregnancies, and also how the birth progressed. In a rare display of anticipation and excitement, Barbara Slater revealed the news of her pregnancy and her physical discomforts in pregnancy in a letter to a friend:

> You ask how I am!!!!!! Guess!!!!! As busy as usual and more so preparing a layette for a little stranger due to arrive at the end of the month. The first three or four months I was too horribly sick to care about anything and didn't do as much sewing as I would have wished. . . . I had the awfullest(!!) struggle to prepare Xmas dinner. However that is all over and since March I have been like a fighting bird, and on the whole so well. (Slater 1912)

The ways in which prairie women approached this unique challenge of their lives, sometimes many times over, demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness and fortitude. The major barriers for women to overcome in preparation for childbirth on the prairies during these years were the lack of trained medical practitioners, whether nurses, doctors or midwives; the long distances to be travelled to obtain whatever help might be available; the lack of facilities at home in terms of heat, water, and privacy for birthing a baby safely and comfortably, and the lack of alternative birthing places, such as maternity homes or hospitals. In addition, with the exception of the homesteaders who were trained nurses or midwives, most women faced the limitations imposed by their own ignorance, particularly of the birth process, but also of appropriate prenatal and postnatal care. These women were without the usual support persons who surrounded women through pregnancy and childbirth. They had no regular access to the care and knowledge of mothers, sisters and aunts, or even of friends and neighbours, except through letters. At best, these experienced women could only give advice and voice concern in their letters about the kind of help the woman might need and should have available to her in her hours of need.

Because of the conditions in which they bore and delivered their babies, and also because of the status of medical knowledge and practice in childbirth, prairie women faced the possibility, every time they became pregnant, that either they or their babies might not survive.[3] Sophie Puckette told the story of her neighbour's preparation for childbirth:

> Then she took me upstairs and showed me all her wedding outfit she had laid carefully away for them to put on her should she die. She imagines so strongly that her life will be given for the little life she is expecting in Jan . . . that she has all her things put in her trunk in order, and each is marked so Mr. Bond will know what to do with them all. It made me want to cry to see the things all ready for her to die, and to hear her talk of them . . . (Puckette 1905)

Harriet Neville, who assisted at many of her neighbours' births, wrote in her memoirs that "out of one family who were neighbours, two of the women died in childbirth". (Neville 1883-1914) Peggy Holmes wrote:

> There were so many bereavements in the district. Two widowers were left with seven children each. That made fourteen more motherless children to be

> cared for. Most of the deaths were caused by neglect at childbirth and still the government would not allow midwives to be licensed in Canada. Why not I wonder? (Holmes 1922, 164)

Holmes' question pinpoints the major problem for women on the prairies. While professionals and politicians discussed the problems of maternal and infant mortality in the west at great length, and debated issues of professional jurisdiction and qualifications,[4] women continued for many years to birth their children without benefit of any trained attendants. Prairie farm women were also forced into the uneasy role of untrained midwife, because there was simply no one else to call upon. Marion Cran, a visitor from England touring the west at the request of the Canadian government to promote it to English women immigrants, raised the issue publicly in Winnipeg in 1908. She wrote later in her book, A Woman in Canada , "At last I found what I felt all along must exist; a hardship to be faced which make women justly shrink from the country. First from one prairie wife, and then from another I heard a cry about the hardships of birth on the homesteads. . . . I heard many stories of courage, stories of disaster."[5]

Perhaps in no other aspect of life on the prairies were women more at risk, and in response, more self-reliant and strong, than they were as they gave birth to their children. The position in which many birthing women were placed, often circumstantial and beyond their influence to remedy it, is a dramatic symbol of what life on the prairies meant for women. Here is where the isolation, the poor roads, the uncomfortably cold shack, the unpredictable weather, the lack of medical facilities and personnel, the lack of friends and relatives, the lack of compassion and understanding from her partner, her lack of knowledge about childbirth, and her own weakened condition from overwork and an inadequate diet all converged to make a homestead woman vulnerable and powerless. It is not surprising that the maternal mortality rate was shockingly high. "Quite a few, quite a few died. And even then with the doctors. . . . So many died so quick. And they didn't know what it was" (Magdalena Zeidler 1910-). A report prepared by the Dominion Bureau of Statistics for the federal department of health in 1922 showed the maternal mortality rate for rural Alberta, at 6.3 per 1000 living births, as the highest in the nine provinces (excluding Quebec) surveyed. In the same year, Saskatchewan's overall maternal mortality rate ranked third highest of the nine provinces, after those of Alberta and British Columbia.

The report also admitted that the incidence of maternal deaths could be as much as 25% greater than the figures reported.[6] The feelings of Monica Hopkins are understandable, as she assessed the situations her friends and neighbours found themselves in at childbirth:

> I had heard so many appalling stories of abnormal births since I came out here that I have made up my mind to spend the nine months in a hospital to be on the safe side! Mrs. B. has just had her second babe, under the most unpleasant circumstances to my mind, though they seem fairly ordinary out here. (Hopkins 1909)

At the same time, some women felt they had to measure up to the standards of bravery and resourcefulness they saw in other women around them. Kathleen Strange wrote:

> When I observed with what serene confidence and lack of excitement the country mothers faced it, many of them giving birth to their babies without either a doctor or a nurse's care, I realized that whatever my personal fears and qualms might be, I must try to face it in the same courageous and confident fashion if I was ever to hold my end up with them. (Strange 1920)

And Margaret Thompson too, despite her knowledge of the complications that could arise in childbirth, claimed that she thought to herself "if other homesteaders' wives could take it, why not I?" (Thompson 1920) She thought her nurse's training would help her through even if the doctor, who was fifty miles away, could not make it.

It was not uncommon for a woman to be alone when she gave birth, without anyone to assist her or to comfort her. This occurred because her husband was away, or because he did not return with a neighbour, midwife or doctor in time for the birth. As Mary Edey recalled, "The first child I had I think I was all alone when he was born. My husband went for a neighbour woman and the neighbours were so far away I think I had him before they got back." (Edey 1914-) Margaret Shaw delivered a child all alone in her bedroom while her husband did the milking and her children played under the supervision of a housekeeper a floor below her.

The need to rely on others to fetch doctors, midwives, nurses and the distances these messengers had to cover often put women at risk. Three times Margaret Shaw delivered a child before the doctor who had been sent for arrived. Two of those births took place in

town, where she had moved temporarily to be close to medical aid only to find on one occasion that the doctor was out of town when her time came. Mary Cummins remembered two of her birthing experiences:

> When Tom was to be born Colin sent a man off to Broadview for the doctor but he fell foul of the drink. He and the doctor slept on the prairie arriving at the house when Tom was already 12 hours old . . . when Marjorie was born in March 1889, I broke down completely and nearly died before the doctor could get to me. (Cummins 1883-)

Even when doctors were available, many homesteaders could not afford them. And so they relied on the help of a neighbour woman, a midwife, their husband, or, occasionally, a trained nurse. Young women were often hired to help out around the house for a few weeks after the baby arrived, but even this was a luxury for some. As Maria Potter recalled, "We didn't have doctors, nurses or hired girls in those days but my husband was very handy around the house and could even bake bread, so we managed fine, with an occasional neighbour dropping in once in a while to help out. The drawback was that we were so far apart". (Potter 1884-) And Eliza May recalled "People didn't have money to spend on doctors. It cost $25 and mileage at the rate of $1.00 per mile to have a doctor tend a maternity case."(May 1888-) Sometimes the lack of professional care had serious consequences. As Catharine Neil wrote:

> Someone told me that the girl's mother was very ill and not expected to recover. I went to see her and offer my help. Mrs. Kirk was there nursing her and told me it was a case of blood poisoning through neglect at childbirth. The woman was German and had quite a number of little ones, and as doctors were far away and the cost of bringing them too much for these poor people, they had a neighbour come in whenever a baby was expected. (Neil 1905-)

Many women in this group of homesteaders had their babies at home, without the assistance of a doctor or nurse. Midwives or neighbours attended them, and they were usually women without any training, except what they had gained through experience. In turn, these women were also called upon to attend other women in childbirth, and for some it was a responsibility they did not take lightly, nor one for which they felt adequately prepared. Clara Middleton's story points out that women, regardless of their preparedness,

were expected to respond when other women needed them: "You're a woman and you're needed" she thought her husband was thinking as she tried to decline to help:

> His wife was in labour and would I come? I protested that I wouldn't be any good, that I knew nothing, and urged him to go at once for Mrs. Lane. No, his wife wanted me. . . . In a rebellious mood I dressed, and while still sure that I must refuse got into the wagon. My own child had been born with a doctor and a nurse in attendance. I had been passive figure in their hands. What I knew or didn't know was of no consequence. Now it was of terrible consequence. So I arrived at the house distinctly "in a state". . . . I waited until the doctor [who arrived after the birth] said the mother would be all right, and then went home to stumble into bed and gave my ragged nerves a rest by a fit of wild crying. . . . I went there every day for two weeks, and the Barnes family, quite foolishly, regarded me as a sort of benefactor, when in reality I was only an ignorant woman standing around helpless in the face of a crisis. (Middleton 1905, 48, 50)

As Harriet Neville described the situation many homestead women found themselves in: "I tried recently to count the number of births at which I was the only assistant. I was never thought very strong but for years I never went to my bed without leaving my clothes ready to slip on at a moment's notice and a candle ready for my husband to light and go to the door when a call came." (Neville 1885-1914) Kaja Froyen referred to the "midwife from Denmark", Mrs. Sorenson, who travelled from her farm nine miles away to attend all of Froyen's births. (Froyen 1904-1913)

Even Margaret Thompson, a trained nurse, found herself feeling apprehensive about being a midwife for her neighbours:

> He was visibly excited and said "I'm Tony.- Misses you come quick-a, my signora very sick-a, bambina stuck and won't come out-a!" I did some rapid thinking. How was I to cope with such an unknown predicament and nobody to help me but Mother Nature? No pre-natal care, no district nurse, and the only doctor 50 miles away! His horse and buggy could never make it over bumpy roads full of potholes, even if the only telephone in the district could be reached. . . . I had heard that homesteaders' wives learn to be resourceful and were quick to learn the procedure of normal childbirth - 'nolens volens' . . . . I was conducted into the small bedroom where the patient lay in agony. The clean bed was surrounded by several frustrated women, who were counting their rosary beads while praying loudly and fervently. I asked them to leave the room and fill every available pot and kettle with water to bring to a boil on the cookstove in the kitchen. . . . I recognized a breech presentation; the delivery would indeed be a complicated and difficult one. It finally was successful. A

> perfect bambino made his entrance into the world, rather limp just now, but no doubt a future good Albertan. . . . A feeling of a job well done came over me. Like most of us, I marvelled at the ever new miracle of birth.
> (Thompson 1921)

Lena Kernen Bacon used her nurses' training to the advantage of women in her community. She held social gatherings for women at her home where the birth and care of a baby were discussed. And she went to whatever births she was asked to attend. She wrote in her memoirs:

> In my three and one half years on the prairie I cared for thirteen obstetrical cases without the aid of a doctor, as we were thirty miles from Davidson and that was too far to go by horse and buggy. One baby born near Girvin, died in spite of a doctor in attendance. Here I was, nurse and undertaker, and even lined a homemade casket with white silk and artificial flowers. The mother asked me to hold a bedside service. (Bacon 1904-1908)

Midwives, including those who were nurses, provided an invaluable and often free service to whomever asked for it, regardless of economic circumstance or ethnic background. As Mrs. Sparks wrote about the welcome arrival of her Scottish sister-in-law, who was a trained nurse, "After that no little new Canadian ever arrived in Township 23 or surrounding townships, be he English, Irish, Scotch, Danish or German but was thoroughly scrubbed by her." (Sparks 1910-1918) Some nurses and midwives did receive some pay for their work, but the fees were small and rarely solicited. Lena Kernen Bacon wrote about charging three dollars for her maternity nursing care, in her case a necessary request because she was a widow with a young daughter. Those who could not pay cash paid in kind with gifts of chickens, butter, eggs or other staples.

Perhaps the most unusual midwifery story is the one told by Mary Lawrence, who was located in the far north of Alberta, in Fort Vermilion, where no medical services of any kind were available. Her father-in-law had spent some time in Edmonton, studying obstetrics with various doctors in order to return to the north to be as Lawrence described it "a sort of amateur interne during my first child-birth".(Lawrence 1898-1907) Still "all the remedies father had learned, all the medicines he had brought with him for this emergency were useless" (Lawrence 1898-1907,86) as Lawrence wrote later, for she almost died from a postpartum haemorrhage. Before he left the North again, her father-in-law gave the native

mid-wife who had assisted him with Mary Lawrence's first birth careful instructions on how to proceed with future births. This account is unusual in that the cultural norm for childbirth was that it was a women's event, to be managed by women for women.[7] Even the male doctors, when in attendance, were usually not the sole attendant, and a nurse, midwife or woman neighbour who was present was more involved in the care of mother and baby. But the prairies had to out of necessity be a place of innovation, and many husbands and sometimes other men who were not doctors were actively involved in childbirth. As one woman described her family's approach to childbirth, "I stay right here and when my time comes, I call Bill in from the field and he delivers them". Harriet Neville's husband was her only attendant at the birth of their son.

Mary Lawrence's births are also unusual because the midwife was a native woman. In the culture in which Lawrence lived in the north this was not unusual. But for white settlers on the whole, this was atypical. Only one other birth story mentions a native woman as a birth attendant. The subsequent accounts of Lawrence's five childbirth that followed the first demonstrate that native expertise in childbirth was far greater than the knowledge brought by her father-in-law from the Edmonton doctors. By following the native custom of kneeling to give birth, her third childbirth, again under the direction of Nokum Julie, her native midwife, Lawrence found it "the easiest of any childbirth so far". She wrote in her memoirs " And I was so convinced of the logic of this natural method over that to which white women are enforced that I abided by it henceforth". (Lawrence 1898-1907,163)

Mary Lawrence was a trained nurse, which proved to be important in the prenatal and postnatal care she and her babies needed in the six pregnancies she had in her nine years in the north. Even then, the conditions in which she gave birth to her largest and strongest baby, a ten pound boy, conspired against her and she lost him to croup within thirty-six hours. Infant mortality rates on the prairies were high, and as Canadian statistics show, most infant deaths occurred within the first week of life.[8] It is not an overestimation to say that almost every family lost at least one infant at birth or shortly after birth. Sometimes it was the circumstances of the birth that was the cause of death, and occasionally it was the conditions into which the baby was born. Margaret Shaw wrote of her first birth in a rented room in town, "it was a chilly April morning and the room was far

too cold for a new born baby. . . . She was blue with cold." (Shaw 1900-) Evelyn Springett wrote "I shall never forget those awful hours before the doctor arrived. The heat was terrific and I was devoured by flies". (Springett, 1895,97)

The quality of professional care, when available, also proved in some instances to put some women and infants at risk:

> When the doctor arrived the baby had beat him to it. Remember he had just come out of a livery stable. He wore a big coon skin coat which he threw over a chair just four feet from my bed. He may have washed his hands, I'm not sure, but I know he didn't use any disinfectant. (Margaret Shaw 1900-)

> There were no hospitals, no nurse, and just an old, old doctor. And he was going deaf. . . . Well that old doctor he waited on the couch and he helped me. He laid down and he slept and when it got too hard he helped me a little, then he went away. (Mary Unger 1924-)

Some doctors who were fresh graduates had little or no practical experience, especially with childbirth, and certainly not in home births with no facilities available to them. Many of the local doctors spent most of their time farming and there was a high turnover of doctors on the prairies for many years during this period. Lillian Turner described the birth of her third child, the first birth for which she had a doctor's assistance.

> I have been very far down in the valley this time and I pray the dear Lord I may never have to go again. . . . I feel so glad I have been spared to the children. . . . We had the Dr. here three times and the last time he waited from midnight until noon the next day before he gave me chloroform . He is the same fellow who was on the threshing outfit with John. So you will know not very experienced. But he seems to have had good training. (Turner 1906-1908)

Some practitioners simply did not understand or seem to care about the circumstances in which homestead families had to accommodate the coming birth. A story shared by Mrs. Wilson and recorded by Edna Kells is particularly shocking:

> Ten days after Mr. Wilson returned from the hospital, she realized the baby would be born that day. She had arranged for a practical nurse to be with her. When her husband went for the doctor he was to bring her back. But her pains started unexpectedly and her husband was still in bed, though to get up for the first time that day.

> The only thing you can do now she told him, is to go to L. a quarter of a mile away, and see if you can get a man to go for the doctor and nurse, and bring Mrs. L. back with you. When Mr. Wilson was away, Dr. Mal and his wife drove in. They had been married about a month. Mrs. Mal had been a trained nurse. The doctor came to see Mr. Wilson before he got up. When he came in and asked for Mr. Wilson, Mrs. Wilson in great agony explained the circumstances. "You think the baby will be born today?" he asked. "What are you going to do?" He started to scold her because she did not have her nurse before. "Well doctor," she explained " when you have very little money you have to be careful. I felt it was better to have the nurse after the baby came than before." He said there was no use of staying as he did not have the things he needed. Then turning to his wife he said "Nan, couldn't you stay with Mrs. Wilson until I come back from the village?" "It is no use of my staying", she replied, "If you can't do anything".
> Meanwhile Mrs. W. was doubled up with pain. " Do you think you can last until we get back?" the doctor enquired. Then both went away and left her with her young children. They had just been out of sight of the place when Mr. Wilson got back with Mrs. L.
> "Have you ever been in a house where a baby is born?" Mrs Wilson asked Mrs. L. "No" she answered, "and I'm frightened."
> Mr. Wilson took the children out to the corral and told them to play there. He then slipped the bolt of the door so they could not get into the house. He was of a calm disposition and directed the woman what to do as well as he could. His calmness quieted her and somehow they managed. The baby was born before the doctor got back and everything was well. (Wilson 1889)

Contrary to what was going on in other parts of the country, doctors on the prairies did not attempt to undermine or to denigrate the women who attended at childbirth, whether as trained nurses, or as midwives. Some doctors in fact recognized the shortage of help available to women and provided informal on the job training to women who continued to practise as midwives for their neighbours. While they expressed some concerns about these attendants' abilities to handle more complicated deliveries, they understood that even someone with a little informal training and experience was better than a neighbour woman with none. Mary Dawes explained how she became a midwife:

> And I was helping the doctor one time and he come down and said, the lady upstairs said she's feeling sick and going to have the baby but my nurse is sick. Well I said, I ain't a nurse . . . but if I can help you, I'll come up and help. So I washed and put on a clean apron and went upstairs and helped him with this baby when it was born . . . I didn't know that to slap their bottoms to make them cry you see and he slapped the baby's bottom to make it cry and I punched him in the back. I laughed so much afterwards and I hugged him afterwards. I said forgive me I didn't know . . . well I brought twenty-six babies into the world now on the farms, all on my own with no doctor . . . it's give me

> such a gorgeous feeling. . . . I really enjoyed it because I wanted to be a nurse. . . . We didn't charge no money. I never charged a lady a nickel. . . . It all worked beautiful. Of course lots of times we never had the things we wanted to put on the children and do the things we wanted to but as long as I had lots of hot water and lots of clean clothes I managed pretty nice. Well Dr. Olibisky . . . I was with him three or four times and he said "I don't know", he said, "whatever you'll do if you had to go somewhere where there was something bad, and I said that's the only thing that I didn't want to go for because I said if anything went wrong I didn't want them to blame me because I wasn't a nurse and I had no papers. But you're always there ready to help somebody if you can. . . . And they say you can't do those things if you're not a nurse but the doctor just told me what he did when that baby was born, showed me how to cut the cord and wait for the afterbirth and told me if it was all perfect that was everything. Well everything went fine.(Dawes 1922)

The Victorian Order of Nurses set up small cottage hospitals in the western provinces beginning in 1904, originally with the idea they would provide mostly maternity care. But once the start-up grants from the VON had been expended, the communities were unable to sustain the hospitals, and statistics showed that maternity cases rarely occupied more than ten percent of the beds.[9] Few women were able to take advantage of the care the Order had set out to provide, because women were reluctant to use hospitals, and both the fees and the difficulty in getting to hospitals from remote areas prohibited their use. Historically, this was just the beginning of the period in which women would start to choose institutional settings, with trained personnel, over a home birth, preferably with a doctor in attendance. The particular situation of a homestead woman, whose work was essential to the maintenance of the farm, dictated that she not leave the farm to have her babies, especially after the first child had arrived.

In 1910, Saskatchewan introduced a maternity package and maternity grant system for poor mothers. The maternity package contained a few basic supplies needed for a newborn infant. The maternity grant was designed to help mothers in remote areas and in financial need pay for doctors' services. Eligibility for the grant had to be determined by a municipal secretary, a justice of the peace or the local member of the legislature. Between 1921 and 1923, applications for the grant tripled, much to the surprise of the Saskatchewan Department of Health.[10]

In Saskatchewan the municipal-doctor scheme was implemented in 1916, and placed doctors in small rural centres designed to serve a wide rural area. Although these doctors' basic salaries were paid from public funds, a fee for maternity cases was allowed. Half of the doctors working under the scheme worked on a part-time basis and the program did not grow significantly until the depression years of 1931-1936.

Alberta introduced a municipal hospital system in 1917. By 1935 twenty-two rural municipal hospitals had been built, the areas they served representing approximately one-third of the rural population. This system had its origins in Saskatchewan, where "Union Hospitals" were established under a similar scheme. By 1920 the Red Cross had also established eighteen community hospitals in Saskatchewan, designed to serve maternity and minor surgery and accident cases, although by 1924 only seven of these remained open. In Saskatchewan, the Union Hospital plan also did not prove to be the answer to women's maternity needs. The minister of health reported in 1924 that the hospitals handled only 26% of the province's maternity cases.[11]

The informal nursing services provided by homesteading women in Alberta were partially replaced in 1918 by public health nurses employed by the Alberta government and placed in towns where women could visit them for prenatal and postnatal care. However, public health nurses were not legally able to attend childbirths. Only specially trained district nurses were allowed to deliver babies, and the Alberta Nursing Act was changed in 1919 to accommodate the role of the district nurse. The first three district nurses were hired in 1919, two for remote northern areas, where no medical care of any kind was available. At its peak level of service the district nursing service would provide full maternity care in eighteen districts in Alberta. The idea of a district nurse, with training in obstetrics, to attend to maternity cases in remote areas, was a demand of farm women, who both individually and collectively, lobbied the provincial government.

In 1930 the Alberta government took some responsibility to place doctors in four remote northern areas. They recruited four female doctors from England and the local people provided them with cabins centrally located in the district they were to serve, and with a horse to ride to all corners of their district to provide medical services. In eleven other

Alberta pioneer districts the Alberta government subsidized private physicians for their services.

Some women, mostly in the later settlement years, travelled to hospitals or maternity homes in towns or cities to birth their children. The travel was often rough and uncomfortable, with women exposed to the elements:

> We sent word to the doctor nine miles away. She came and found I needed to go to a hospital. She gave me some morphine to slow things so I could get to some professional care she couldn't give. We had no car but a neighbour had an open grain truck in which an army cot was placed and we started eighty miles to the town of Peace River. The sky was clear and the sun was bright. I got a severe sunburn. We reached the hospital without much problem though the canvas on the cot was rotten and split down the middle.
>
> (Elone Stobaugh 1930)

Kathleen Strange, a war bride who began homesteading in 1918, travelled to a hospital in Edmonton for her first child's birth, and to a hospital in Calgary for the second, both a considerable distance from her farm. Her third child was born in Stettler, twenty miles from her farm, where a new doctor and hospital had been set up. She told a horrendous tale of the four hours it took to cover the twenty miles, in a car without a roof, in a severe rainstorm, and in the advanced stages of labour, trying to delay the birth until she arrived at the hospital. Esme Tuck included in her memoirs some notes from a hospital nurse, who wrote about a case of a woman who travelled eighty miles in forty below zero weather in January to have her baby in the hospital. The baby did not survive. Eliza Wilson lost her first child in hospital when the baby was four days old. For the birth of her second child in 1902 she travelled in a cold rainstorm on an open wagon, arriving sixteen hours later chilled and numb, at the home of a friend. She rested for a few days, before travelling alone by train to admit herself to the town hospital. She wrote that she was "very weary" when labour finally began. (Wilson 1902)

As an alternative to last minute travel, some women, like Margaret Shaw, moved into town to rented rooms or the home of a friend to await the births. Barbara Slater moved to town for the winter to birth her second child after a bad experience with the birth of her first child on the homestead. There she had the assistance of a new doctor, whom she

declared "decidedly clever and a "qualified nurse". (Slater 1911-1918) In some cases, women travelled to a nurse's or midwife's home to give birth. As one midwife wrote, this put labouring mothers at considerable risk:

> I was midwife during the poor years and brought many babies into this world. Sometimes the men had to come many miles by team and sleigh through deep snow drifts to get me to help the women. Others would bring their wives to my home to have their babies. I remember one woman coming very early one very cold winter morning, they had tried to get to Empress, Alberta but the roads were so bad they couldn't get through. Turned around and headed for our farm. . . . That woman was so cold . . . . I remember it took me all day to get that woman warm, her baby girl being born soon after they got in our house. Even that poor baby was cold when it was born . . .

Even hospital births were not free of risk for mother and baby. Hospitals were ill equipped to deal with some neo-natal needs, and personnel denied mother's expertise and participation in the care of their own babies. Beatrice Whitehair described her tragic hospital experience in Calgary:

> The new General was open by the time my twins were born. . . . But I lost the boy. He was twelve days old but he was dying. I never brought him home. . . . Oh he just went bad and yet when he was born the doctor says "Well your boy is fine but I'll not give you much for your girl." And I've still got her. . . . Well I put it down to that they didn't bring him often enough to have nurse. And I told the doctor so. I said "You know Dr. Crawford that baby isn't getting any nourishment. I have to squeeze it into his mouth, he hasn't got the power to, he's getting weaker and weaker." Well he said, "I'll tell them to bring him to you all the time." But they didn't . . . . You see at the time there was nothing to help the babies in the hospital. It should have been put in the incubator and got some more strength because they were over five pounds each. So they were good sized babies. (Whitehair 1913)

Some women also chose to travel to their parents' or other relatives' homes to deliver their babies. Evelyn Springett, after a bad experience with her first child's birth on the ranch, travelled to Winnipeg to stay at her brother's home for the birth of her second child. Lillian Turner sent a private note to her mother, separate from her newsy family letter, telling her not to worry about her daughter's first pregnancy. She mentioned that the doctor who was presently in the district was leaving, so she decided to return by train to her mother's home in Ontario to birth her child there. In reading women's letters to their mothers, it is clear that for some women, sharing the preparation for childbirth and the practical and

emotional aspects of infant and child care maintains a strong bond between mother and daughter, even long distance. Mothers understood and worried about what their daughters were going through, as Evelyn Springett wrote "My mother has written urging me to go to MacLeod or Calgary for the occasion, as she did not like my being so far from a doctor, but I had no fear and firmly refused to leave home". (Springett 1895,97)

Ignorance about pregnancy and childbirth was a problem for some mothers. The inaccessibility of medical personnel and the lack of reading materials on these subjects made self-education impossible. Some women indicated a cultural taboo about discussing such topics, even with one's own mother, so intergenerational knowledge and experience was not available to them. One woman claimed that her parents had deliberately kept her in the dark about how babies were conceived. She knew her husband knew, but would not discuss it with him. It was only after her two children were older that she found out from other women how they had been created. The number of trained nurses who were also homesteaders alleviated the problem about lack of knowledge to some extent, as the examples of Mary Lawrence and Lena Kernen Bacon demonstrate. They both provided informal pregnancy and sex education to women they knew. However, many women reflected with regret on their lack of knowledge of childbirth as they faced it for the first time.

Several women also mentioned that they had no knowledge of how to prevent pregnancies, but if they did they would use it. Without this knowledge many women had large families in a short space of time, and spent the better part of their reproductive years either carrying or nursing infants.[12] When you consider the enormous workloads homestead women were responsible for, as well as the conditions in which they lived and worked, the additional burden of continuous pregnancies, sometimes for up to twenty years, becomes an onerous one indeed. Women could not easily set aside their work to rest. Some farm women cut back on some of their heavier farm chores, but for the most part, both farm and ranch women carried on as usual.

"As for prenatal care, there was no such thing for pioneer homesteaders" wrote Margaret Thompson, a trained nurse who homesteaded in the Fort Assiniboine area. (Thompson

1919-1930) The first time many practitioners saw their maternity patients was at the birth. Some women described the kinds of demands they responded to while pregnant. Eliza May found herself a midwife and housekeeper for her neighbour while very close to delivering her own child:

> We took care of each other in case of illness in those days. I never had any training, but was never afraid and was guided to do what was needed. Once a call came for me to go to a neighbour. This was six weeks before my own daughter was born, in November and very cold. It was a two and a half mile drive with an old team and a jumper. When I got there I found it was a false alarm. Next morning I had to come back home and get my little son and bring him to the house. A week later her baby was born. (May 1888-)

Peggy Holmes wrote that she continued working as a hired cook for harvest crews, a physically exhausting job, through her sixth month of pregnancy. And Mary Cummins described an incident on her farm where she found herself at nine months pregnant assisting the hired man to hoist himself out of an 80 foot well after rescuing a foal who had fallen down it.

There was also little opportunity for postpartum healing and rest when "men must eat" as Mary Lawrence put it, and many women delayed their recoveries by returning to their regular work routines too quickly after birth. After her fifth child was born, Mary Cummins had a difficult time recuperating, particularly after four pregnancies close together and a growing workload, and she "withered away" to a weight of fifty eight pounds, from her usual ninety pound weight. She was sent "home" to England to rest and recuperate. (Cummins 1883-) Hilda Rose's birth brought her so near death that she barely hung on to life for five weeks, and it took her another six months to learn to walk alone. Postpartum complications were responsible for most of the women's lives lost in childbirth. While this was true for women across Canada during this period, it was perhaps more the case for prairie women who were without the care they required. Sarah Roberts wrote of her doctor husband's visit to a woman twenty miles away "who had not had the services of a physician during confinement. He found her in a raving delirium. He advised her husband to take her at once to the hospital in Castor. This was done, but she died a few days later, just for the lack of proper care when her child was born." (Roberts 1906, 248)

If women did recover from childbirth, for many their former state of health never returned. Peggy Holmes wrote about a homestead woman she met who had borne many children and worked hard and continuously for many years: "it was difficult to imagine how she looked when she was young, as she was in such poor condition physically and mentally. . . . How she must have suffered! Here was a happy bride, full of hope but now a human wreck."(Holmes 1922,119)

Some women did not passively accept the lack of medical services and facilities available to them at this crucial time in their lives. Alice Rendell after a difficult time with a birth several months after her arrival on the homestead, immediately began a fund-raising campaign for a little hospital for the Barr settlement. She appealed to her friends and relations in England, and wrote in a subsequent letter:

> Some of you are just working hard for the benefit of the hospital here in response to my appeal. A little lumber shack is to be put up almost immediately so great is the need for it. . . . You would not wonder at my taking this so much to heart could you have but witnessed what I have or been through what I myself have suffered. You cannot realize how awful it is. (Rendell,1904)

Perhaps the most unusual birth story I found among women's accounts is a story told by Ellen Lowes about a neighbour woman's experience:

> Shortly after the train service to Yorkton became regular, an event almost unbelievable occurred in the train. The usual Saturday night train leaving Portage La Prairie for Yorkton had as a passenger a lady travelling from England. She was expecting very shortly to become a mother, but was suddenly taken ill on the train. The baby was born in the women's lavatory, but disappeared through the toilet. The conductor stopped the train, and went back and picked up the young man. Many people consider this an impossible yarn, but I watched this baby grow to young manhood . . .(Lowes 1882-1900)

The stories of homestead women's birth experiences are diverse and reflect differences among women in ethnic background, socioeconomic class and education. The common element is couples' resourcefulness in attempting to achieve as safe a birth situation as they possibly could, within the restrictions imposed by their families' limited resources, the lack of trained medical personnel available to them and given the families' geographical

location. As these accounts show, this was not an easy undertaking, but one that was often tainted with fear and apprehension, and one which brought hardship and tragedy.

In the absence of health care facilities and practitioners, and sometimes in partnership with them, homestead women responded to each other's childbirth needs, sometimes with hesitation and fear, but they always responded. They provided each other with the practical and emotional support that childbirth demanded, and often in defiance of legislation or medical practitioners' attempts to control childbirth. They assisted each other at childbirth because they were the only ones available to do so. As one woman characterized it, childbirth was a time of sisterhood for many women of this generation on the prairies. This sisterhood was still exclusive however, in that the expertise of native midwives was utilized very infrequently by some homestead women. That was unfortunate, for native women had generations of experience in delivering children in conditions very similar to the ones in which many homestead women found themselves giving birth.

Partnership

Central to modern mythology about the homesteading generation of men and women on the prairies is the idea of the pioneering partnership. It has served as a useful image for social control, particularly related to silencing women who are asserting their rights and pushing for equality measures throughout the history of both provinces. The ideal of the pioneering partnership is a union of man and woman that is marked by respect, interdependency and working side by side for the good of the family and the community, "good" usually being measured in economic terms. Prosperity is good, poverty is evil. There has also been a suggestion that in the homesteading partnership, women were "more equal" (an anomaly in itself) to men than at any other time in history. This myth is a reflection of the reality that women's work was never more necessary to men than it was on the homestead. This fallacy of equality will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Still there are reasons to suspect that the partnerships formed by men and women who homesteaded together did have qualities not found in relations between men and women in other situations, because of their mutuality of goals and effort. The writings of women in this group suggest several realities: that for some, a strong bond of mutual love and companionship was strengthened and reinforced through commitment to a common enterprise; for others, their partnership was a source of pain, abuse, neglect or continual strife. For some women, their expectations of a close, loving relationship were shattered as they realized their husband's goal in marriage was to secure a work partner to ensure the success of his enterprise.

It has already been mentioned that fifty-one percent of these homesteading women were in new marital relationships. For that reason, we are offered a glimpse of their relations with men as they come to terms with their decision to marry and its consequences. For many women, passion was integral to their feelings for their new partner, and diaries in particular reflect the change of mood, from despair and loneliness, to joy, after a night of reunion and love-making when a husband returns home. Several women questioned whether their love of their mate was strong enough to endure the test of the conditions in which they lived together.

Four women wrote candidly about the emotional and psychological abuse that was a regular feature of their lives with their spouses. The potency of men's criticisms and condemnations must be understood in the context of young women being placed in a new environment, and feeling incompetent and unsure about all that was expected of them. When husbands ridiculed and humiliated them, it was doubly difficult to bear because these women were trying so hard to "measure up" and had already made some extraordinary adjustments and accommodations, and demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness and competence. Their "greenness" rather than commanding support and assistance, provided an opportunity for their husbands to hurt them and harass them. Three of the women in abusive relationships were treated with considerable neglect, and this extended to the times when they were pregnant, when no accommodation was given to their physical and emotional needs, and two of them were, effectively, abandoned by their husbands for the birth period. One of these women identified her husband's infidelity,

and the uncomfortable position he placed her in when he brought one of his women friends to the ranch for an extended visit. Another woman's life was endangered through the thoughtless cruelty of her husband.

A caring partnership seemed to make the workload lighter. As Emma Richards described it:

> We would go hand in hand to do the chores, build, pick rocks, anything at all for this was our new world. We would expand our chest and say "isn't it grand, away from the hustle and bustle and people, doing something for ourselves". You cannot imagine the feeling you have to go through this. (Richards 1906)

Relationships based on shared goals and interests were enhanced when men acknowledged women's substantial work contributions and the investment women had in the outcomes of the family enterprise. Some women were shown careful consideration when they were pregnant, being relieved of heavy work, and encouraged to rest and take care of themselves. Some husbands expended extra effort to ensure their wives had nutritious food throughout a pregnancy. All of these seem practical considerations, however they were dependent on the quality of the marital relationship.

While some women identified the characteristics of their husbands that disappointed them or annoyed them, most women only presented a factual account of their husbands' activities, and their own worries when the men are away on the road, or late in returning home. The enormous pressure women felt to get along with their spouses, because in most cases they were their only regular companions, and because they were dependent on them economically, resulted in many compromises. Some women are forthright in stating so, while others hint at their discomfort, their disappointments and their frustrations. Most women were careful to reveal their husbands in as positive a light as possible, particularly if writing to relatives. Perhaps more than any other emotion, loneliness, often combined with homesickness, was women's predominant feeling. It was often carefully hidden from husband and children, and many women make reference to never allowing their husbands to see them cry. Perhaps women of this generation felt they had to be the emotional stronghold of the family, and thus any sign of weakness on their part meant they were disloyal, or not good wives or mothers. It may also reflect the depth of their

despair, as they knew how futile a few tears were when there was no hope of altering their unhappy situation. And for some women, any discomforts they experienced, mental or physical, had to be hidden from their husbands' knowledge, for they would be used against the women in order to control or to humiliate them.

Support networks

Homesteading women received support, both practical and emotional, from three sources: distant friends and relatives; neighbours; and native people. Distant friends and relatives were usually those "at home", at their place of origin. The importance of letters, packages and reading materials sent by people far away has already been discussed. The content of these letters was significant in helping some women overcome their fears, their loneliness and in answering questions about housekeeping, food preparation and childcare. An ongoing dialogue with a friend or relative via regular letters was crucial to maintaining a woman's positive outlook in the early years of homesteading, before other sources of support could be found locally. Women requested needed items from their correspondents, like garden seeds, old clothes to make over for their children, sewing patterns, reading materials, and sometimes, money. Monica Hopkins wrote about her family: "every time they see something either to eat or wear, they rush to buy it and send it to me." (Hopkins 1909) For Hilda Rose the reading material sent by a correspondent in California - a woman whom she had never met - saved her life. Her intense loneliness and need for intellectual stimulation were assuaged by the book and magazines she received on a regular basis.

The second major source of support for homesteading families were other homesteaders, and they were both close at hand and along the routes homesteaders had to travel. Women provided and in turn received, meals and a bed whenever it was needed at the homes of other homesteaders. Only one woman, Emma Lowes, related an account about being turned away at a time of need while travelling to their homestead. Women "sat" with

other women in times of confinement or illness. Neighbours came to help with chores when men were away. Neighbours drove for doctors; helped prepare the dead for burial; helped each other with crises like prairie fires and accidents; and with regular work like milking and haying. Homesteaders picked up mail and supplies for each other, and shared expertise on many matters, including sewing and breadmaking, midwifery, barn or house building, gathering and preserving food. Women directly benefited from contact with their neighbours, and unfortunately for some, these contacts were infrequent. However, one of the fondest memories for some women is the kind of community feeling they enjoyed in the early homestead years, as several women described it, it was like "one big family".

> There was a great sympathy among the early settlers. When one had good luck, everyone was glad. When one had bad luck, sickness or sorrow, he had the sympathy of all. We felt our neighbours' hearts beat with ours in trouble and joy. That was the beautiful part of the life. (Stedman 1884-)

Several women were conscious of ethnic and class differences among members of a community, and expressed some surprise that these differences had no import when it came to social relations, or practical aid. For a significant number of this first generation of women, preferences for people "of their own kind" remained despite the social mix in which they found themselves situated.

When women's organizations became established, whether sewing circles, ladies' missionary societies or farm organizations, their monthly meetings provided an essential support network to women living on homesteads. Both the practical information and emotional support they offered made these groups something women cherished and relied upon for making their lives a little better.

This research suggests that women's relationship to natives indigenous to the area was quite different from that which is presented in most popular prairie literature. Mrs. Stedman claimed that women who "had never done a day's work" and who were endeavouring to learn breadmaking and other skills, relied in their first few months on the homestead on the help of native women. (Stedman 1884-) Homestead families relied on natives to clear land, assist with livestock, accompany the women of the family when they travelled, and

do housework. These arrangements with native hired help were usually short-lived and sporadic in nature, except on ranches where seasonal work on the range provided more regular employment for native men. Homestead women found native women's abilities at house cleaning quite different from their own, and gave up on the idea of hiring native household help. In the north, natives worked as guides and paddlers for transporting families to and from their homesteads, and as midwives. As the nature of many tasks assigned to native helpers show, there was trust between homesteaders and native friends. The relationship between women and natives was not without tension and ambivalence, but there was reciprocity. Natives were always supplied with food by women homesteaders, despite the fact that food was often in short supply, and were provided milk for native infants. Many times native family groups would camp on homestead land. Homesteaders exchanged meat for wild game with natives, and doctored their illnesses and afflictions. In Fort Vermilion, Mary Lawrence entertained native visitors on a daily basis, providing meals, and occasionally assistance like help with a sick baby. She also responded to natives' questions about birth control and on sexual relations between men and women. Natives in turn brought her presents of wild game, and other objects of practical use, and performed work on the farm to pay for kindnesses rendered.

Women did speak of fear or nervousness when natives they had not met previously entered their homes uninvited, as was their custom. In all cases documented, the natives were simply looking for warmth, or supplies, and intended no harm. Mary Lawrence, Monica Hopkins and Harriet Neville all report social relationships with natives, where friendships were made, and playful interaction took place between families. Some women cannot shed their prejudices and their feelings of superiority, despite the opportunities to entertain natives in their homes. In this group of women, it was several of the Canadian-born women who proved to be least tolerant of natives and their culture.

Feelings about the land

A common thread woven through many of the women's accounts of homestead life was their strong feelings about the natural environment that surrounds them. Its beauty, its vastness and its emptiness inspired both fear and awe. The reactions were as varied as the landscapes themselves. Hilda Rose, in her northern isolation, wrote "The land looks green, lovely and lonesome . . . the silence almost gets me."(Rose 1926) For many women used to the noises of city life, the silence was the most pronounced feature of prairie life:

> I think the two words, silence and whiteness, will ever be associated in my mind. In those dreary winter months, when almost all life had deserted the prairie, and often the horizon was indistinguishable and one could not see where snow ended and sky began, it seemed as if there could be nothing but silence and whiteness in all the world . . . the distant howl of the coyote (or prairie wolf) would only serve to accentuate the terrible silence.
>
> (Hilda Kirkland 1885-1905)

The vast open spaces and the quietness were new to most women who came to the prairies. "The vastness of this country is wonderful and fearfully wild" wrote Alice Rendell. (Rendell 1903) And Hilda Kirkland agreed with her: "After being hemmed in by houses, trees and hills all my life there was something very awe-inspiring in the vastness, the immensity of the space in that "great lone land". (Kirkland 1885-1905) Space, distance, silence surrounded one." And Emma Richards found both wonder and despair in the open spaces about her. "You could see for miles and miles. It was really wonderful . . . the nights got dark very early in the late fall, and the prairie looked so black with only the relief of bleached buffalo bones and not a tree in sight, it became very depressing." (Richards 1906-) But Esme Tuck, in her Peace River area home found that "After four years of war and the hustle and bustle of the long journey and chattering human beings, the group of poplar trees outside our window, so still, minding their own business, were a source of strength." (Tuck 1918) For Mary Inderwick, it was the Rocky Mountains that strengthened her. "And then the mountains burst on our view! They appalled me and entranced me at the same time with their beauty. I grew to love them afterwards. They were true friends - always there, firm, strong, faithful." (Inderwick 1884-1888) Several women, like Lillian Turner and Georgina Binnie-Clark loved the sight of the large fields of

grain. Turner wrote to her mother "the grain is wonderful and you can hardly imagine what it is like without seeing it. It is grand to see fields of it stretch for miles and miles."(Turner 1907)

Lena Kernen Bacon learned to love the environment which she at first found so barren and lonely. Writing about visitors who had just left, she painted an appreciative picture.

> I do not know what they thought about the wonders of Canada . . . from our front yard they could see the sand hills, the home of our wildlife, and for miles and miles the rolling prairie. . . . We often saw mirages on the horizon that looked like cities with sky scrapers. At other times large bodies of water came to view and then mysteriously disappeared. We saw the sun, the moon and the stars in all their splendour, with nothing to obstruct our view. . . . It is a place where the earth was friendly and the heavens enveloped you with all their beauty. The sun, moon and stars were nearer you and to increase and enhance it all, the Northern Lights frequently put on their heavenly display.
> (Bacon 1905)

Comparisons to the sea helped to explain the prairies to those who have not been there. "I wish I could give some adequate idea of the vast loneliness of my life on the prairie. All around us was the never-ending roll of the hills, like huge sea waves, some of them mountains high." wrote Evelyn Springett.(Springett 1893-1903) Hilda Kirkland also used the sea to capture the essence of the prairie landscape. "The prairie has been aptly likened to solidified Atlantic Ocean, and I know of no better description. There are small undulations in its surface, but they are lost to the eye in the great distances, so that the general aspect is one of absolute flatness." (Kirkland 1895-1905)

Despite their particular appeal, sometimes the prairie lands also inspired feelings of homesickness, for softer landscapes and trees. "Oh, I did yearn for Scotland, it's so pretty there" Edith Lawry remembered.(Lawry 1919-1925) And Mary Edey recounted "I was here for so many years, I had that longing . . . for the trees. The bald baldness of everywhere you go, and the wind. And the trees are so beautiful back home. That was one of the hard things." (Edey 1914-)

Women recalled the effects of the wind on their disposition, and the extremes of weather that made the prairies a difficult place to live.

> It would be impossible to exaggerate the disturbing quality of this Chinook wind. I am sure it was responsible for much of the "nerves" and crankiness that undoubtedly are a feature of prairie life. In looking over old letters written to my mother from the ranche I find in nearly every one of them some reference to the wind: "A nerve-wracking, peace-destroying wind has been blowing ever since I arrived. . . . It rages and roars, whistles and shrieks . . . if I let myself dwell on it for long, I shall never be able to stand this country!"
> (Evelyn Springett 1893-1903)

As Mabel Hawthorne described it, "In this West everything is intense: even the weather. We can say we have the coldest climate, the hottest, the windiest and the most glorious sunsets to be seen anywhere." (Hawthorne 1906-1918)

The prairie environment seemed to appeal to women in ways they had never imagined it would, and some felt a strong attachment to the land and to the lifestyle. The natural characteristics of the land and the ways of life it fostered were inextricably intertwined, and reactions to this were both positive and negative, but always intense.[13] Kathleen Strange's response to having their crop destroyed by hail and her trip to England cancelled as a result demonstrated the emotional relationship to the land that lay at the heart of homesteading for many women:

> For I was bitterly disappointed. I had so looked forward to the trip and now, as on many other occasions, this country had crushed my hopes. I felt I hated it. Sometimes I had imagined myself being drawn to it, but now it had thrust me away again. (Strange 1922)

Maria Potter wrote about her unexpected attachment to the prairies: "When I came west it was with the hope we would soon make our fortune and return East but I came to love the Canadian West. It seems to get a hold on one and before long I had no desire to leave. (Potter 1884-) And Evelyn Springett, whose initial reactions to her new home were ones of despair, wrote:

> I sometimes think I might have grown to love the freedom of the West almost too well had my husband only liked it better. . . . Yet it was a good life in many ways. The air was so fine and clear - clearer, I think, than anywhere else in the world; . . . and one felt a deep joy in just being alive and alone.
> (Springett 1893-1903)

Lena Kernen Bacon described the appeal of the natural environment and of the lifestyle as if they were one. Her feelings about the land and sky are written above, and in the same account, she wrote:

> Had it not been for Frances, [her daughter] I would have stayed in Saskatchewan. Canada held many interests for me. Foremost was the freedom of a great new country with no fences to hold one in. It was a place to give birth to one's own dreams and there was an opportunity to make them realities. It was a place where one could put flesh and sinews on the bones of former contention, freely using the materials on hand, and from the heart, enjoy the simple product, feeling like a millionaire. It is a place where the earth was friendly and the heavens enveloped you with all their beauty. The sun, moon and stars were nearer you and to increase and enhance it all, the Northern Lights frequently put on their heavenly display. It was a place where you met people who had an optimistic outlook on life. Not much to do with, but a willingness and determination to do their best, even in adverse circumstances. (Bacon 1904-1908)

As Margaret Ward, a ranch woman in Southern Alberta originally from an upper class household in Ontario, wrote, the relationship between the geography of the prairies and the soul was very real, although difficult to explain to those who had not experienced it.

> I love the freedom of my life here and I try to make everyone about me share a bit in my happiness, so I have plenty of friends. . . . My life may seem rough and bare, but there is something to compensate one for every hardship and trial. You must come to see me though, for it is the spirit of the west that charms one, and I cannot convey it to you try as I may. It is a shy wild spirit . . . but I must warn you that if it once charms you it becomes an obsession, and one grows very lonely away from it. No Westerner who has felt its fascination ever is really content again in the conventional East. (Ward 1884)

Women's response to the wild beauty and freedom of the prairies and the lifestyle they found there is as much a comment on the life they left behind as the new life they found in the Canadian West. Still the spiritual effects of the land and its enormous potential to fulfil the dreams of those who settled on it created for some women an intense love affair with the prairies.

To sum up women's experiences of prairie homestead life, and the pains, delights, tragedies and triumphs that constitute those lives is a foolish undertaking. The diversity of

experiences and perspectives defy any categorization. It is important however to recognize that the first generation of women who came to homestead in Alberta and Saskatchewan, whether they were single, widowed or married, and whether or not they had children, faced conditions and challenges that taxed their mental and physical strength and resourcefulness. Some women thrived on meeting the difficulties that confronted them; most women were happy just to survive them. The interconnections of geography, climate, economic resources, settlement patterns and interpersonal relationships cannot always be untangled. Each woman's situation was unique because the combination of these was different for each woman. But there still remains a particular time, place and process which makes the stories of their lives harmonious, and it is particularly their common experiences as women that resonate most clearly. The ways in which women were required to respond to the situations in which they found themselves, and in doing so, safeguarded their own safety and sanity, provides us with a special perspective on homesteading. The prairie homesteading experience was a unique human challenge in Canada's history, but it was one significantly differentiated by the position in which one came to it, that is whether one was male or female.

Chapter Five: Power and Control

> A married woman on the prairies had the responsibilities of an adult partner and the legal status of a child.
>
> Rasmussen et al.

The freedom and opportunities of the prairies, of which some women wrote so glowingly in their accounts, acquire new meaning when the legal and social status of women in their families and their communities are examined. Women's inability to control the money earned from their labours, the denial of their right to own a homestead, their fight for the right of guardianship of their own children, and the economic vulnerability they faced upon death of or desertion by their spouse all suggest that freedom from some social conventions of the past had little effect on women's equality with men in prairie society. Numerous social conventions survived migration, restricting women's decision-making powers, determining their personal mobility and prescribing codes of dress and behaviour, all contradictory to the new demands of homestead life. Some of these contradictions became apparent, and were addressed by individual women within their family life. Other women continued to practise the customs and behaviours they brought with them, feeling comfortable perhaps that in doing so they maintained their feminine identity. The larger issues of rights determined by law were addressed by individual women and by women coming together in groups to demand changes in provincial and federal legislation. This chapter focuses on homestead women's social power, as it was determined formally by law and exerted informally in relationships.

Money and property

Despite the near self-sufficiency of many homesteads, money was essential for survival on the prairies. Land and possessions both required money and produced money. Homestead women, both ranchers and farmers, were very diverse in terms of their

economic resources, but there was one fundamental commonality: married women were not legally entitled to receive wages for any of the work performed on or for the homestead. In practical terms, this means that a homestead wife worked to improve the wealth of her husband, and she had no legal claim to that wealth while he was alive.

Women married as much for economic security as for love. There were few other choices available to most women at the turn of the century. Yet as a result of marriage, a woman's labour was appropriated by her husband, and she was not entitled legally to any of the products of her labour until dower legislation gave her as a widow an interest for her life in the homestead. This legislation also required that all business transactions concerning the homestead property required her consent. Until this legislation was passed, in Saskatchewan in 1915 and in Alberta in 1917,[1] marriage made a woman more economically vulnerable and impoverished, according to the law, than if she had remained single and attempted to support herself.

The mediating factor that made women feel secure economically in marriage was the nature of the relationships they shared with their husbands and the work partnership they formed with their husbands. Some women, and in this group there were five, found themselves economically at risk or powerless because of a poor or failed marriage, or the untimely death of their husbands. Most women enjoyed a certain recognition from their spouses that their contributions to the economic welfare of the family were substantial and that wives should be provided for without question. It seems that most couples understood this to be the nature of their marital commitment to each other. However, the files of the Attorneys General in both Saskatchewan and Alberta contain a significant number of letters from farm wives who have been abandoned by their husbands, and whose economic future is uncertain. An "understanding" between spouses was not sufficient to ensure the wife's economic security, and the law that required married men to maintain their families was rarely enforced, largely because it was too difficult to find the men, or they moved out of the province.

Women in this group of homesteaders fall into two distinct groups: those who had some money of their own, because they worked before marriage or because they came from

families who provided endowments for them; and women who had no money and were totally dependent on the joint earnings of the household. Men sometimes had no money either when they came west to homestead and in several cases it was the wages of the woman as well as the man, working in town at jobs like cleaning and dish washing, that allowed the couple to move to their homestead and prove it up. Mary Dawes explained how she and her husband could not homestead right away because they had no money. They worked for wages in Calgary first, eventually buying a small house there. When they moved to the homestead it was the ten dollars monthly rental income from their Calgary house that they had to live on. As Dawes described it "So we had it very very hard." (Dawes 1922-) In contrast, Mrs. Cayford wrote that she and her husband had one thousand dollars with which "to build and start a new life".(Cayford 1902-1922) Lena Kernen Bacon arrived with one hundred and fifty dollars, and before moving on to her homestead, lived in the town of Girvin for a short while. There she bought a town lot for seventy five dollars and sold it again a few months later for one hundred and fifty dollars. She wrote that she arrived with all she needed to keep house on the homestead, but because she was short of funds, she borrowed the heavy farming equipment and horses from her brothers to work the land.

Many homesteaders found themselves cash poor and land rich in the early years of settlement. Any activity that could generate a little cash was undertaken to alleviate the situation. Lillian Turner wrote about baking bread for a bachelor neighbour and charging him ten cents a loaf. She also sold sittings of eggs for fifty cents each and declared in a letter home "I'm not going to sell any more for any less".(Turner 1906-1908) Harriet Neville cured animal furs and fashioned hats and mitts for her family. She turned this into a cash generating activity when other settlers showed an interest in her product. Neville also became an expert at spinning and knitting after she bought sheep, and made a regular modest income from heavy mittens she created. Eliza Wilson found a source of cash in providing bed and board to a man staying with them to learn ranching. The ten dollars he paid per month was obviously most welcome as she wrote "paying pupil are great!" Wilson also sold her butter for cash, like many ranch and farm women. Butter was expensive, and a sale of seventy pounds such as Eliza mentioned in her diary might bring as much as seventy or eighty dollars. Mary McCheane reported that she and her husband had to

borrow a thousand dollars from the bank to feed and pay the threshing crew, and that they "used to allow a pound a day of butter per man for threshing time".(McCheane 1916-) She expressed her annoyance that the bank would take the interest off the loan "up front". This banking practice is witness to the difficult financial situations in which many homesteaders found themselves. Georgina Binnie-Clark farmed on her own and described how difficult the financial decision-making was for her, when money was always short:

> For years I had argued loftily that poverty should never be permitted to matter; it threw down the glove to me again and again in fighting my way through the proposition of farming three hundred and twenty acres of land on the Canadian prairie with insufficient capital and only a growing experience, which always seemed to arrive at the spot just too late to be of use. Whether it was that I had to think hard for thirty-five cents to sharpen a ploughshare or to think hard for a hundred and thirty five dollars to settle indisputable claims for indispensable service of horse or implement or man, I had to think hard all the time. (Binnie-Clark 1905-1908, 289-290)

In some areas, where there was no market for butter and eggs, women found there was little work they could do for money. Maria Szmyrko explained that as a single woman coming to a remote area of the prairies, the only work available to her was clearing bush, which she did. Once she married and began homesteading, she found that women were expected to clear their own land, and that there was enough work doing that, that "they couldn't go out and get paid for it" any more.(Szmyrko 1930) Maria Potter wrote in her memoirs that "at one time we were down to thirty-five cents . . . for prices were not very high for what we had to sell, and often we'd plan what we'd get when the crop came off and then have to draw a black line through the list, for the wheat would be frozen." Yet she maintained a perspective on their problem by adding "But yet we knew that lots of wives had a hard hard row, especially when there's a lot of little children and the men spending money on booze when they didn't have shoes on their feet." (Potter 1884-)

Potter's remarks raise the issue of control over money. For the most part, it appears that although the money earned by both husband and wife legally belonged to the husband when it came from work performed on the homestead, most couples shared in setting the goals and priorities when it came to spending the money. There were a significant number of cases, however, where money was controlled by men and withheld from women. There

were also situations where money needed for the family was squandered for men's pleasure, and more commonly, where the farm business was always put before the needs of women and children for household equipment, clothing and schooling. The 1922 Manitoba farm survey showed that "Only seventeen percent of the women reported any personal spending money".[2] Gertrude Chase wrote to her mother that it had been years since she had had a new dress, and she didn't expect she'd get one for a while longer. Mrs. E. Stewart of Milestone, Saskatchewan wrote to an executive member of the Women's Grain Growers' Association of Saskatchewan:

> . . . there is another thing that should be mended and, and that is that a wife should be allowed to have some money. Now in my case I cant have a cent. I have been working hard . . . for our half section of land. We have our farm located on edge of town, and I took in dressmaking, and sewed nights and days, besides doing all my own work, and with the money, helped to pay for the farm. Our farm is now paid for, and I am not able to work like I used to, but If I want any money I have still got to sew for it, as my husband will not give me any money. A woman cant get along without any money any more than a man can. Now this is not fair, and there should be something done for it. I cannot even sell a few eggs and take the money for them, after me raising the chickens myself. There is lots of men just like this in Saskatchewan. I often wonder to whom I might put my complaint so that it might be looked into and perhaps get something done for it. Please advise. I consulted a lawyer one time about this problem and he told me a husband did not have to give his wife any money if he did not want to. I think it is terrible that a wife has to work hard all her life merely for her board.[3]

Georgina Binnie-Clark observed early in her farming career :

> Through the shoulder to shoulder rub of everyday working life in Canada it grew clear that although more giants had issued from the male division, within the crowd men have hoisted their pretension to superior power not on the rock of superior work but on the sands of superior wages - the misappropriation and unfair division of money. (Binnie-Clark, 1905-1908, 164)

Some women who had money of their own coming into the marriage maintained control over it, but in most cases the amounts were small. The money was often used for enhancing the comfort and enjoyment of the family in the purchase of household items, clothing, books and small presents. Some women invested in livestock, occasionally enjoying some profit in return for their investments. Harriet Neville wrote about receiving an inheritance when her father died. In addition to making substantial improvements to the

homestead with her new found wealth, she bought magazine subscriptions and she invested in the community and in livestock:

> I was sent some money left for me by father and I tried to use [it] to the very best advantage for the benefit of all of us here. Our people wanted a school very much. I loaned them money to build a schoolhouse, they paying it back in yearly instalments. . . . I think my investment in sheep was perhaps the most satisfactory of all else. It was not long before we had a large flock and could have once in a while a lamb for meat and numbers of them for sale. (Neville 1882-1905, 50-51)

Other than Neville, it was ranching women in this group who owned their own livestock. Eliza Wilson owned eight cows and one calf, and showed great despondency when one cow died. She also traded a steer for one of her father's horses, although she allowed her father to make the decision about which horse was best for her. Mary Inderwick was given a horse by her husband, and Monica Hopkins received a mare as a wedding present from their hired man, and another mare from her husband to "start her bunch". She wrote that she had five horses in total, two being new foals from her mares, and would soon have to apply for a brand of her own.

Two women in this group had full control over their financial situation throughout their homestead years. Lena Kernen Bacon came as a widow to claim her homestead and to build a life for herself and her daughter. As a trained nurse, she was able to make a small income and leave the prairies after proving her claim with a profit made on her land and some savings earned from her nursing visits. Georgina Binnie-Clark purchased her own farm and managed her own finances, and her book Wheat and Woman chronicles her financial challenges in farming as her apprenticeship progressed. Her initial investment funds were supplemented with loans from banks in both England and Canada to keep the farm operational.

The real wealth of the prairies lay in ownership of land, and it was from this that most women were barred, by lack of money to purchase it, and by homestead law that excluded them from the privilege of claiming free land unless they were widows with dependent children. In this group of women, three owned land as widows, although only one came to the prairies on her own to claim her own homestead. The other two inherited

the property at their husbands' deaths, in one case, only three years after the family had settled. Some women felt this discrimination about property rights keenly, and a "homesteads for women" campaign was launched in both Saskatchewan and Alberta.[4] Both men and women signed petitions to the Canadian government, requesting that Parliament, which had the authority over land in the two provinces until 1930, introduce a bill to grant the privilege of homesteading to women.[5](See Appendix C.) In this group of women, the issue of land ownership was raised by only two women. The most vocal person about the issue is Georgina Binnie-Clark, a single British woman who was forced to purchase her land and incur debt in order to realize her dream of farming in the Qu'appelle valley of Saskatchewan.

> It was enough to prove to me that farming on the prairie properly done is farming easily done, and that, worked out on a well-thought-out plan, it is a practical and should be a highly profitable means of independence and wealth for women as it has always proved for men. But on every side my neighbours had obtained their land as a gift from the Government, or at least one hundred and sixty acres of it and a further hundred and sixty had been added on the condition of pre-emption, which is by payment of three dollars an acre in addition to homestead duties; in this way a farm in every way equal to the one which had cost me five thousand dollars was to be obtained by any man for nine hundred and seventy dollars. So that even allowing that a woman farmer is at a slight disadvantage in working out a farm proposition, she has the killing weight of extra payment thrust on her at the very outset. She may be the best farmer in Canada, she may buy land, work it, take prizes for seed and stock, but she is denied the right to claim from the Government the hundred and sixty acres of land held out as bait to every man. I talked to every man about it, and almost to a man they said: 'Too bad!' (Binnie-Clark 1905-1908, 299-300)

Binnie-Clark decided to take a trip to Ottawa on her way to New York to speak to a federal cabinet minister about the homestead right being extended to women. She learned that other women have already begun a campaign:

> I learned that Canadian women have taken up this matter of the land grant with a deep sense of injustice of a law which, whilst seeking to secure the prosperity of the country in enriching the stranger, ignores the claim of the sex which bore the brunt of the battle in those early and difficult days when our great wheat-garden of the North-West was won with courage and held with endurance. No pen can depict the fine part that women played in the spade-work of British expansion in this, the supreme place of prosperity among British lands. (Binnie-Clark, 1905-1908,307)

It is important to consider why the issue of property ownership and homestead rights was never raised in the writings of the other women in this group. The only other reference to land was by Harriet Neville, who indicated that women could be as easily affected by "land-craze" as men:

> This disease of land-craze has made a lot of trouble. Many men, and women too, have contracted it. It seems so easy when they have their homestead patent to wish for just another quarter section, and instead of improving the one they have, to spend all their profits on more land. It gets to be a mania and they will cheerfully do with less, and no more comforts, to save the price of more land, till, if alone, they grow morose and careless of their looks and health and clothes, and careless about friends and nothing about church or schools. (Neville 1882-1905,53)

Neville's writing gives us a clue about women's perspective on land ownership. Both because of the social and legal tradition from which most of these homestead women came, and also because of the work partnership with their husbands which was essential to the success of the homestead, many of these women did not view their economic interests as separate from their husbands. Nor did they consider the possibility that husbands may not act in the best interest of their wives. British common law historically considered the union of husband and wife "one person", and it appears that is how many of these women considered themselves also. At the same time, while they acknowledged that they attained social power through their husbands, they still see their social identity as something distinct from their husbands. It is this identity that lies at the root of the push for dower rights, for community property legislation and for suffrage by farm women in both provinces. The need for recognition of their contributions by society is central to their identity as farm women, and in particular as pioneer women who gave everything they had to build a society where none had existed. They sought justice from society, as embodied by the government, not from their husbands. Where unfair practices, such as withholding money from their wives, or selling or renting the farm out from under them occurred, the husbands were supported by the legislation of the day. So women felt the need for change was at the legislative level. At the same time, as the struggle with the idea of community property illustrated, it was difficult to individualize in law something that was not inherently individual. The mutual interdependency of homestead partners, in work and economics, was not easily separated into independent interests. The attempts to

establish legal subjectivities could in practice, create economic dependence for women from partnerships based on interdependency.

There was another factor that determined this generation's approach to the issue of land ownership. Many of these women were operating right on the edge of survival, both physically and psychologically, for a good portion of their homesteading years. The enormous energy that children, household and farm work extracted meant there was little time left to consider the bigger questions of rights and privileges, but particularly to do anything about them. Part of the survival energies had to be directed to exerting their influence on decisions made on their own homestead. Numerous women indicate that they had to work hard to persuade their partner to get the things they wanted at home - like a flower garden, a lawn, household items, a horse and buggy, things for the children, a chance to visit family. It would be difficult for women to address the government on land rights and voting rights if they were still learning how to negotiate and to develop some personal power at home. However, it is precisely because these women of this first generation learned these skills at home, in order to preserve their own sanity and safeguard the things that were important to them, that they were able and courageous enough to eventually take these skills into politics. Mrs. E. Stewart of Milestone, Saskatchewan, wrote again in July 1918 to an executive member of the Women's Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association:

> I went to Regina one day last week and I staid [sic] in to see a lawyer. . . . I also asked him about women's rights in the homestead. He told me that a wife could stop the sale, lease and mortgage of the homestead all right while she is living on same, but the husband has a right to rent a house someplace else and move his wife on it, and then sell the homestead after she is moved. I was much surprised to know this. Now, what good are these homestead rights in the home for wives if this can take place, - simply no good whatever. A mean husband will do anything. I know a man not far from here that moved his wife into town last year and then he turned round and sold his homestead, and went to the States with the money. He told her when he went that he would buy a home in Alabama and then send for her and the children, but he did not buy a home; he spent the money in no time, and she had to take in washing to support five children. So this is what such laws mean. It is just terrible that a poor wife can be used like this, in this country where we got to work so hard. This matter should be taken up, and worked on very quickly. . . . P.S. I forgot to tell you that this lawyer said that a wife had no right whatever to any of her husband's property nor money in this country, under the present law.[6]

Because of women like Mrs. Stewart, who began with a concern for their own economic rights and security, and took those concerns further to push for legislative change, the loophole in the Saskatchewan Homestead Act that allowed male farmers to rent their property without the consent of their wives, was partially closed by an amendment in 1920. The property legislation in both provinces, however, still did not make homestead women full economic partners with their husbands. This would not occur until another lobbying campaign was undertaken by prairie women over fifty years later.

Mobility

There are significant differences between men's and women's lives during homesteading years on the prairies with respect to their freedom of movement. There are two ways to look at their mobility. One is the standards of dress and fashion that women ascribed to, or challenged, that affected their body's ability to move effectively and comfortably. The other type of mobility is the ability to travel away from the homestead where and when one wanted to go.

Women found that clothes that followed conventional fashions inhibited their ability to work. But many did not change it, and as Maria Szmyrko described it "you see the long dresses, and that's how they worked in the fields."(Szmyrko 1930) Edna Banks provided in her memoirs a detailed account of her complete outfit as she arrived in Regina:

> In between the bonnet and the boots, I pulled on a pair of long, over the knees, hand knit soft Andalusian wool yarn stockings, over a pair Penman's ankle length pure wool combinators and fastened all my 106 pounds, into a pair of corsets with steel stays, which I modestly had under one plain tight-fitting and one fancy over-all embroidery and lace trimmed corset cover. At the time nobody questioned the sanity or the waste of time of all that rigmarole. That was what ladies wore and that's what ladies wore. Today over fifty years later, I do question the sanity and courage of us all, and wonder how on earth I could have burdened myself with at least two, maybe four petticoats, when

> my thirty-six inch long navy blue serge wedding skirt (and no mean weight) barely cleared the floor and dirty streets. Maybe my five foot and one quarter inch frame did sag. (Banks 1911)

If "that's what ladies wore" at the turn of the century, it is also evident from women's accounts that both time and common sense eventually had some influence on these conventions for some women, although the majority simply dressed in plainer versions of their usual layers of corsets, petticoats, skirts and shirtwaists. Monica Hopkins wrote that she wore her corset every day, even on a camping trip where vigorous hiking took them in the mountains away from the scrutiny of society. At her husband's suggestion, Esme Tuck bought her first pair of jeans "to save my legs from being torn to pieces in the brush when on cow hunts."(Tuck 1919) Women did find their long skirts impractical for farm work and for travel. Edna Banks told a story about getting her skirts caught in the cogs of the seed drill box as she climbed up to sit on it and that her husband "slashed and hacked through my skirts with relish and vigour" to set her free.(Banks 1911) Riding habits were the most common deviation from the norm of long skirts until World War One brought new fashions to women, in both clothing and hair. The story about Edith Lawry cutting her long braid to get it out of the way of her work has already been told in chapter two. Kathleen Strange wrote about the stares she received for her "bobbed hair" when she arrived in 1918, and she noted that most of the farm women still had long hair pinned up in some fashion. Soon however, she noticed many women copying her more modern hairstyle.

The fact that traditional modes of dress and hair styling were inappropriate on a prairie homestead because of the nature of women's work and the environment in which they lived and performed their work, did not bring about any significant changes in women's approach to female fashion on a broad scale. Their clothing was an essential part of their identity as women, its importance was never just functional. It was an emblem of womanhood, the kind of womanhood they knew best, the kind they had brought with them to the prairies. As Clara Middleton wrote: "I went on the roof . . . and helped him lay six or seven "squares" of shingles. I wore a sweater, an old skirt and a flannel petticoat, for in those days no woman of taste would have been seen in men's pants or overalls." (Middleton 1904,15)

With regret, and some longing, many of the pretty dresses and fancy shoes, hats and trimmings were stored away in the bottom of trunks. But homestead women still adhered to the fashion of the day, and this was more likely the fashion of the day they arrived, as little new clothing was purchased in the early years of homesteading. As Mrs. Duthie explained, many people used only the clothing they brought with them for many years and so prairie culture became less in step with the fashions of the outside world as time progressed. Eaton's catalogues helped women to see what was current in women's fashion and many with a talent for sewing would copy these fashions if they were able to afford the materials, or occasionally order "ready-made" items. But staying in step with fashion of the outside world did not mean that the clothing they wore enabled them to move freely when performing their hard physical work, or in climbing in and out of wagons, up and down stairs with heavy loads, or chasing after children or animals. The clothing itself was a burden, both in terms of the bulky laundry it generated, and the effort it took to put it on and to carry it on one's body all day. Some of the women also complained about cold feet, and moccasins provided by natives in exchange for food were popular items among homestead women. Many women never had the luxury of warm boots to wear in winter, and skirts were also poor protection for ankles and legs when sitting in a wagon. Several women described experiences of legs and feet being frozen by the cold.

Clothing then had some effect also on women's ability to travel across country, whether to visit neighbours or to go to town, particularly in winter. Lillian Turner wrote to her mother her first winter on the prairies "I am afraid I won't be able to get out much. We have no sleigh and no furs, and people say furs are almost necessary." (Turner 1906) But the mobility of women on the prairies was a much more complex issue than the need for suitable clothing. Besides the dangers posed by bad weather, women were restricted by social custom and discrimination, by lack of a means of transportation, and by the daily demands of their work.

There was a practical side to the cultural rule that women should not travel alone. Should some disaster befall a woman on her own, such as an unscrupulous stranger, an unmanageable horse, or natural events such as fires, bad roads, or a storm, she would

not have to manage the situation alone. However in a country where the same women were often left to manage homesteads on their own, the social custom of requiring male companionship to travel to the nearest neighbour or nearest town seemed inappropriate to some homesteading women. It appeared to be a mechanism of control, rather than one of practicality, so some women determined they would be independent, and taught themselves to ride or drive wagons and buggies to overcome their isolation from each other.

> I have had quite a number of callers . . . several of them have ridden over alone, others have been driven over by their husbands or sons. . . . I'm sure I shall like them all but I don't suppose I shall see them very often, they all seem to live so far away and those that are dependent on their men to take them about evidently do not get taken out very much, they seemed to think that it was a great occasion. I've decided that I'm not going to be dependent on anyone so I ride nearly every day, generally just around the place but I have been out on the range alone. (Monica Hopkins, 1909-1911)

Beatrice Whitehair, Gertrude Chase and Harriet Neville drove their wagons alone into town to do the families' trading, or drive to visit their neighbours:

> When I used to go so often to Regina [20 miles] there were several houses near the trail and every time there were women on the look-out for me. I was always willing to do any errands for them. . . . Coming home it made me a little later as I had to deliver the goods with whatever change was coming, but I never cared for that. There were some women who nearly never had a chance to go to town. Either they could not leave small children or were not strong enough to stand the ride on a heavy lumber wagon. (Harriet Neville, 1882-1905)

> It seems I am too busy to think about writing. We got us a team of horses and I have been getting out to some of the neighbours around here. Went berry picking a few times. (Gertrude Chase 1918-1923)

> And I drove a team to Olds and that was of course to do all the trading you see. As long as it was half way decent. What I mean when it got too cold, my husband would do it. But we try to arrange it so we didn't have to come to

> Olds oftener than two weeks. Because it's a long trip, and they were working horses, they weren't carriage horses and you don't race those. . . . And I had to come whatever day it was easy for my doing you see. . . . And you know that 12 miles can be very lonely driving. It's a lonely trip. (Beatrice Whitehair 1915-)

Many of the women were able to travel only at the convenience of their husbands, which greatly restricted their ability to visit neighbours, attend women's meetings, shop or visit in town, or participate in church services. Women mentioned their restricted mobility in their writings, some with resignation, others with anger. Marie Rudd described her situation: "Well it wasn't often that we went there [to church, three miles away] because my husband wasn't much to go to church, so it wasn't so often we could get there."(Rudd 1927) Her husband did take her every Saturday night to town to shop and to socialize. Mary Cummins wrote "There were some neighbours but they were two or three miles away and I never got over to their homes." (Cummins 1883-) Katharine McNamee described how Wadena, twenty miles away "was our trading town, my husband used to go in once a month to Wadena for supplies and groceries."(MacNamee 1906) MacNamee also observed how the lack of mobility was hard on the Scandinavian women in her district, because they could not learn English like their husbands and children did. Mabel Barker clearly saw the expectation that she stay at home as a social practice, rather than just a practical one:

> And we only went to town about once a week. The fact is there was weeks when the womenfolk didn't always get in. . . . Well I suppose it was, you see in those days, the men were very much the head of the house. And invariably a trip made to town there was business to be done purchasing for, the men had to do it, because we had to go into Calgary for everything you see. (Barker, 1912-)

Mary Inderwick was upset with her lack of control over her own life and she identified it as a problem resulting from her sex. "Charlie drove me to the mill and would not take me to Pincher Creek for some reason best known to himself. I wish I was a boy I could go where I chose by myself then. I think Charlie very mean". (Inderwick 1884) Charlie did not return to the mill to retrieve her for a week and Inderwick wrote in her diary every day "still

Charlie has not come". On the sixth day of her wait she wrote "I am so tired of expecting him - went a long way to meet him - had to come back as I went alone." (Inderwick 1884) Inderwick was an accomplished rider and had her own horse, but her freedom to go beyond the ranch and her access to other people was severely restricted. Eliza Wilson noted in her diary that the first time she gets away from the ranch to visit a neighbour is a month after her arrival. Wilson expected and hoped to travel to her parents' ranch for Christmas, and although her husband travelled to their district a few days before Christmas, he refused to take her. Mrs. Donaldson got out to see a neighbour once a month, sometimes walking with her children to the neighbour's farm, and visited the nearest town only twice a year, as she was dependent on her husband's interest in including her in his travels. Grace Bartsch wrote in her diary that she had to postpone a trip to town because her husband Criss was too busy the day she planned to go.

Women were also housebound because they had no means of transportation, other than walking, or the means they had could not take them very far. Mary McCheane explained that "on a horse ten miles would be about as far as you'd want to go."(McCheane 1916) Work horses were slow for travelling long distances, faster horses were a luxury for farmers, though a necessity for ranchers. Ranch women seemed to have more mobility because of the availability of horses, and the likelihood they would have more opportunities to learn to manage them on their own. Open wagons and sleighs deterred women from travelling in cold or rainy weather, and many women were glad to save themselves and their children from exposure to the elements on trips that were long and uncomfortable. "If you went into town in a wagon and sat up there it rained hard on you or the sun would blister you or it was cold. You never knew how to dress . . . you're so long on the road too" Mary Edey explained.(Edey 1914) Mary McCheane remembered winter travel most vividly:

> When you think of the open rigs that we used to go out in, you know open sleighs and teams, . . . you'd never hear of babysitters then, if you couldn't take the children, you'd be home, you wouldn't go, you'd stay home . . . we'd have hot bricks for your feet and things like that, in open sleighs, warm stones, hot from the oven. Put cured beef hides in the bottom . . . and another on your knees with robes underneath. At 40 or 50 below you'd be all right. You'd be so dressed, if you did get out to walk, it was hard work. (McCheane 1916-)

McCheane also mentioned that she never met the people who lived on farms on the other side of town, just ten miles from her homestead, and she could never get to meetings of any kind. "As to meetings we just couldn't get to them," wrote Alice Self. "If you saw the roads in those days - oh oh they were awful". (Self 1912-) If the condition of the roads, the lack of a means of travel or the weather did not prohibit women from travelling, then the presence of young children or the work requirements of their daily life often interfered. Hilda Rose wrote about her life on the ranch in the foothills of the Rockies. "I can't go anywhere very often, though I do get out for at least one picnic every summer, given by the Farmer's Union. . . . But it's the winters that are trying. That is why I have to have something to read, or go crazy."(Rose 1907,7) It is amazing that Rose later chose an even more isolated lifestyle on a homestead in the far north of Alberta. Mary Edey described how women were tied down to the farm by the work and childcare schedules they managed:

> They had to come in and feed the horses. You'd have to have a good meal ready and another one at six o'clock. And you had to have those meals right on the dot, because they had to get going again. You had to do all this in an hour . . . if you didn't have the meal ready and they had to wait and they missed their sleep [15 minutes worth] it was awfully hard. So you just stayed home and cooked, and stayed home. . . . That's another thing, you had to stay home because you had to have something warm for them [the children] when they came home. They were starving. (Edey 1914)

When Edey was asked if she ever got a chance to go visiting people, she replied "No, well maybe the odd time, not very much." (Edey 1914-) Most women's diaries reveal that it was the men of the family who travelled about the countryside the most, both for business and pleasure, and both, of course, were often accomplished at the same time. While some women, particularly those with older children, seemed to show some independence in their ability to drive themselves to the neighbours or to town once in a while, women still relied on their men to take them longer distances. They also spent more time taking care of things on the homestead while the men travelled about, often on a daily basis. So while a woman might get to town once a week or once a month, her husband might be in town every day. Her workload and work schedule, including the care of children, simply did not allow her the same freedom of movement. Many women admitted the loneliness that this lifestyle of restricted mobility brought to their lives.

Relationships

Homestead women found themselves vulnerable and at a disadvantage in marriage in ways similar to other women in society. Some men used violence and force to control their wives. Others treated their wives and children as property or even livestock, not people. Some women found themselves pregnant as a result of rape and had to marry men who didn't want them. Women found when marital relationships broke down that they had no right of guardianship to their own children. And should she "misbehave" or try to run away, a woman could find herself committed to an asylum by her husband or by the police acting on his behalf. All of these possibilities are mentioned in the dairies, letters and memoirs of women in this study. Sometimes they were reporting the experiences of their neighbours, and sometimes they were describing their own lives.

Catharine Neil told the story of her neighbouring family:

> The wife came to us one day and in her broken English asked Jim to take her to the train, as she was sick and wanted to see the doctor. . . . She returned a few days later and told us "police get husband if he make her horse". We then found out that the cow and the woman had done the plowing. Jim loaned him a horse and he did the rest with the horse and cow. The Mountie came to the farm and warned him about abusing his wife. She showed us the marks left by the whip. He was a bit scared after that. She came one day to tell us he had left her, with no money and no food, so we helped them out till we got her relief from the municipality. (Neil 1905-)

Harriet Neville related the account of a neighbour's suicide, explaining "There had been trouble between him and his wife and . . . he was a kind husband when not under the influence of drink".(Neville, 1882-1905) Margaret Shaw wrote about her neighbours who lived a couple of miles west of her farm. "They were continually having family rows. . . . None of the neighbours had much use for them, and Dad had forbidden him to set foot on our place." She described how one day after beating his wife one more time, "V. did not get away with it this time".(Shaw, 1900-) His wife shot him in self-defense and he ran to a neighbour's with half his face shot away. He was taken to the doctor but he died in a couple of days.

After seducing Mary Lees on promise of marriage, Charles Inderwick declared four months after the marriage finally took place [he tried to escape it] that Mary made him "wish himself dead and buried". He continued his relations with other women after his marriage, leaving Mary on her own frequently. "I am always watching and waiting for him and always being disappointed" Mary wrote in her diary. Later she wrote "I wish myself disposed of too." and the next day, she entered, "think I ought to be hardened to it by this time . . . when I get home I will forget that I am less than no one here and I will be happy in spite of fate." (Inderwick 1885) Eventually, after the birth of three sons, and following her husband to a tea plantation in Ceylon after his ranch business in Alberta failed, Mary Inderwick left her husband and returned to her Ontario home to raise her sons on her own.

Mary Inderwick's story is unusual, because on dissolution of marriage, women rarely received legal custody of their children. In Alberta and Saskatchewan, women did not obtain right of guardianship to their own children until 1920, and only after campaigns to change the laws in both provinces were mounted by women, particularly farm women's groups. While this was the legal control on women's rights as parents, it was often not the practice. Men would often leave the children with their wives because they were not interested in being responsible for the children's welfare. This left women, who were deprived of their home and their livelihood, to support their children on whatever wages they could earn in town. At the same time, they did not have legal powers to be the custodial parent, or make decisions about the children's educations.

Despite significant changes in women's legal status in the period between 1880 and 1930, including the right to vote, and the introduction of new legislation to "protect" women and children, the basic relationship of women and men on homesteads was barely altered. A woman was not a person but "an adjunct to some man".[6] Even where the law required some action in support of women's legal claims, individual women were subjected to extreme hardships and discrimination, due to required waiting periods, and particularly due to attitudes of the judiciary and the bureaucracy about women's credibility. Florence Williams wrote to the Deputy Attorney General of Alberta about her husband's desertion of the family. Her husband left her on the farm with severe back problems, and sold off all

the farm's goods and livestock and pocketed the money. Mr. Henwood, the Deputy Attorney General, responded to the situation with the comment "It may be that due to her nervous condition she is inclined to magnify her grievances against her husband, although I realize that every effort must be made to help her".[7]

It appears that for women who enjoyed good marital relationships with their husbands, the need for legal reform and social change with respect to homestead women's position was seen as a human justice issue, and the government should "set it right". As Elizabeth Clark wrote, in a letter to Premier Scott of Saskatchewan in 1913:

> I for one would never of gotten discouraged so quickly if I could have seen anything coming to me for all I was going through on the homestead, although my husband repeatedly told me he would give me my share. . . . I felt humbled to take anything off my husband in a way although I knew it was rightly mine. I always felt I wanted the law to make it straight for me.[8]

For women who were threatened with loss of their home and their livelihood, the issues of power and control over their lives and the need for legal recognition of their contributions were more than social problems, they were also personal crises. They sought protection and justice from the law, and found themselves at considerable disadvantage. Women effectively were still vassals on their husbands' estates.

Women who sought legal reform for the property relations between men and women understood it was the social definition of the nature of marriage that they were also trying to alter. In a 1924 report of Mrs. Wyman, the United Farm Women's Laws Committee chair, the underlying concept of community property legislative proposals in other jurisdictions is presented:

> For the first time the married women's household work is legally recognized as a contribution to the maintenance of the household. By smashing the old idea that the wife is supported by the husband one of the strongest chains that have bound women is broken. The law now recognizes that her work in the household has a value which places her on a level with the husband as a supporter of the family. [9]

While some American states and some European countries successfully passed community property laws during the 1920's with this fundamental understanding, Alberta and Saskatchewan politicians managed to delay any reform that would address the inequities of dower legislation and support the community property interests of women until the 1970's. Equally significant perhaps is the fact that women and men in marriages continued to believe and to perpetuate the ideas that men were the heads of the households and women were the servants of the husbands and of their interests. As long as both Alberta and Saskatchewan remained predominantly rural demographically, these ideas would continue to flourish, as women judged it in the best interests of "the farm" or the maintenance of "the farm community" not to challenge the supremacy of male hegemony in land ownership and in family financial decision-making. The agencies designed to serve the farming family, both farm organizations and government agriculture departments, encouraged and enforced this power structure.

Competence and interdependency

Women in this group of homesteaders were strong and competent women. Any woman who succeeded at homesteading had to have these qualities. While women's legal status, and for some, their poor relationships with husbands, undermined their security and their wellbeing, their indisputable contributions to their homesteads, and the importance of these to the homestead's success, were critical sources of personal power in their lives.

It has already been described in chapter three how women were empowered by their work. They felt pride in their ability to overcome hardships, to meet the challenges of learning new skills and in demonstrating new competencies. When women recognized their own capabilities, and equally important, their indispensability, they also realized their power of influence. Their men could not operate the homestead without them. Some women were rewarded by a new respect from men, but more importantly, women gained a new self-respect. Hilda Rose found that the choice she made to homestead in the far north of Alberta was highly regarded. "I find I am treated with great respect by the men in

here. That's because they admire a woman who will follow her man into the wilderness and stay with him." (Rose 1928,143)

Women found a new sense of personal power in their working partnerships with their husband. Knowledge that many tasks were successfully completed because they worked in concert, each contributing equally, was important knowledge indeed. "I helped Dad shingle the roof of the house and the sides. I helped him with the well pasture and anything that wanted doing. We were partners in a new world" wrote Emma Richards.(Richards 1906) Harriet Neville recalled "While haying I had sometimes driven one ox with the rake while my husband pitched the hay into heaps."(Neville 1882-1905) Esme Tuck remembered "I helped my husband with almost everything and he in his turn helped me."(Tuck 1919-) Magdalena Zeidler described the way she and her husband completed his contract work on a neighbour's farm. "Oh I went out in the hayfield. He worked one year for --, putting hay up and I usually have to stack the hay. . . . I enjoyed it. It was hard. Sometimes it was hot, you nearly fainted."(Zeidler 1910-) And Kathleen Strange wrote about her loss of her working partnership with her husband when they moved into the city:

> My own life, on the other hand, is almost completely changed. And most important of all, I am deprived of the one particularly vital thing. On the farm I was a <u>real</u> partner with my husband, sharing with him in almost every detail of his daily work. Now his work is carried on in a downtown office, with professional help. There is little I can do now to assist him. (Strange 1928,293)

Emma Richards, as well as other women, recognized the strain on the relationship that working together imposed. "I prayed to God to give us strength to carry on and give us health, and make us see that we were having our willpower and strength in each other tested to the limit." (Richards 1906)

Demonstrations of competence, even at tasks one abhorred, were important to homestead women, and significant sources of esteem and influence. Margaret Ward was an early rancher, a woman entering a male world. She wrote to her friend in Ontario that "the cowboys anyway back me in my attempts [to live in a civilized way] and indeed back

me in all my schemes because I ride well - I verily believe if I did not ride they would have nothing to do with me, as it is they are rather proud of me".(Ward 1884) Ellen Lowes described herself "very timid and afraid" to travel long distance on her own with horse and cart to meet up with her husband who was driving their first cattle herd home to the ranch. She wrote "This, I realized was quite the most important thing I had been called upon to do. . . . She [her friend] thought it was terrible, and said she wouldn't attempt such a trip, but I wasn't to be discouraged."(Lowes 1885) The feeling of accomplishment and pride Lowes felt as she and her husband brought the herd home together is evident in her writing. Competence was very important to Kathleen Strange who wrote with some satisfaction "I realized that I was at last running my own affairs - the domestic end of the farm, with a greater smoothness than I had ever dreamed possible. I had come on the farm knowing nothing at all about either cooking or housework." (Strange 1920, 218) Just sticking to a job she disliked was an accomplishment for Sarah Roberts. "I stayed with my job [branding] until it was done, and I am glad that I never had to do it again. I think that it is not women's work except that it is everyone's work to do the things he needs to do."(Roberts 1906,226) Women did find some satisfaction in proving their competence at tasks with which men struggled, as well as skills they had never attempted before. Ellen Lowes wrote about her husband's frustration with carpentry work, as he tried to construct a partition in their cabin. She took over and accomplished the job with ease. She also attempted upholstery for the first time, constructing an upholstered chair from an apple barrel. For Georgina Binnie-Clark, proving her competence as a farmer, and doing it as independently as possible were very important. She wrote with pride about having grain that was "the cleanest that went into town" in 1907 and that her 1910 crop was "the cleanest and best sample of grain threshed in the neighbourhood". Describing herself as "rebellious" when it came to work, she announced with pride at the end of her first year of farming "I have made a step forward in my work and got on terms with the daily round. I am going strong - absolutely independent of people and circumstances!"(Binnie-Clark,1907-1913, 213)

It was apparent that sometimes when women proved themselves competent, their husbands struggled with their success. Esme Tuck was a talented gardener, and when she grew a remarkable forty pound cabbage in her garden, her husband took credit for it.

When Spencer Tuck returned from town one day to find Esme singlehandedly and successfully fighting a prairie fire which had returned in his absence, he took over the work, accusing her of burning the stack and starting the fire. Peggy Holmes was not afraid to tackle any task, and yet when she showed initiative and fortitude, such as in building the outhouse, as well other tasks, she was scolded by her husband for not doing them "correctly". Edna Bank's husband criticized everything she did, including how she climbed into a wagon.

All homestead women were aware of the essential role they had in maintaining the family and the farm or ranch. Their indispensability had both positive and negative effects. It restricted their ability to enjoy the company of other women, and to get away from the daily routine. It exhausted them daily and aged them prematurely. At the same time, it gave them a complete knowledge of farm operations, and they learned most of the skills required to run the farm on their own. This knowledge and experience was a source of power. Equally significant was the husband's knowledge that he could not operate the farm successfully without his wife's labour and expertise. This fact shaped the gender relations between men and women on the homestead as much as did the economic dependence of women on men. Men's dependence on women's labour, knowledge and skills was one of the reasons for men's fear of losing control over their wives, and for using every mechanism of control available to them including withholding money, violence, criticism and condemnation, and denying them visits to town or to see other people. Edna Bank's husband suddenly realized, as she lay in her bed seriously injured, what his cruel thoughtlessness that caused her injuries had cost him. He wailed that she "must not die" because he did not know how he would manage without her. (Banks 1911)

Women demonstrated their indispensability in a variety of ways. Ranch women who were not included in the work on the range nevertheless had intimate knowledge of the business of the ranch. Helen Millar hired men to work on the ranch and kept track of their labour and time. She maintained detailed records of all the ranch stock, and all cash accounts. Even the post office, which was in her husband's name, was completely managed by her in their ranch home. Amelia Lucas conducted most of the family business, managing the farm help and the finances, doing all the paperwork,

correspondence and bookkeeping. She also administered the school funds for the district, although it was her husband who was the school trustee. Grace Bartsch was an integral part of the family ranch and slaughterhouse business. She did the bookkeeping and correspondence, and kept records of the hired help, noting in her diary the tasks and hours of every employee. She hired a cook to help with feeding the slaughterhouse staff.

Farm women found they had to be all things to all people at all times. As Beatrice Whitehair claimed "As I said on the farm you had to be a little bit of everything. In those days especially because you hadn't got the money."(Whitehair 1915)
Esme Tuck would agree with Whitehair, as she described this expectation in her memoirs:

> A man on a homestead gets a good bargain in a wife . . . it was not so much what one knew as where one was expected to be that was the crux of the whole situation. "Ubique" which serves horse foot and garrison as motto for a crest could very well serve the homesteading wife too. Everywhere, yes indeed.(Tuck 1919-)

Perhaps no better indicator of farm women's indispensability was their inability to stop working even when they were sick. When men became ill they stopped working and the women took over their work, performing a triple role of nurse, housekeeper and farm worker. "I went through a lot. You had to be doctor, nurse, and everything. When Ivor was sick I used to put the bread in the oven and go for a load of straw, come home and take a batch out and go for another load of straw" wrote Emma Richards.(Richards 1906) Nor is the assumption of women's duty to make men's lives easier restricted to marriage relationships, as Georgina Binnie-Clark discovered in her dealings with hired men. "None can make clear the labour and energy which women distribute, looking after the personal need of men who never give a thought to the work they are creating, but will spend hours meditating on the work they can evade" she wrote, with her usual sharpness. (Binnie-Clark 1907-1913,227) And she continued later:

> I was still very inexperienced and still rebelling against the newly acquired knowledge that in everyday shoulder to shoulder life men take so much kindness and consideration from women for granted but calculate the value of every scrap of their own service; and then, in their veneration for the world's opinion, demand that woman shall also fill in the blank space, or erase the blot on the record which every man is still under the illusion he keeps with the well nigh exhausted tradition of chivalry. (Binnie-Clark, 1907-1913,184)

While Binnie-Clark is perhaps more vocal than most farm and ranch wives about the ways in which women's work and service to others were taken for granted, she admitted that being a woman farmer is a very different thing from being a farmer's wife. For, unlike most of the other women in this group, she had financial independence, she had control over her life's course, and of course, the responsibilities that accompanied these. Homestead women knew they were needed on farms and ranches, not just as wives and mothers, but as indispensable labourers who could do just about anything that was required. This reality, as it was lived and understood by homesteaders of the first generation on the prairies, became a important source of informal power for women in their relations with their spouses, and eventually in politics.

As the sources used in this study demonstrate, it is important to look beyond the usual measures of legal status and economic and social position to determine the nature of power and independence constitutive in people's lives. Homestead women found themselves in a restricted lifestyle in which personal freedom of mobility, the right to earn money for one's self, the right to own property and to spend time as one wished were all severely compromised. Nevertheless the opportunities of their new life, to develop competencies and skills, to manage a shared business enterprise, to move beyond the traditional spheres of women's activity and influence, to know their own importance to their families' survival, provided a new foundation for a personal power that enabled them and motivated them to negotiate or to act on behalf of themselves and their children, both on their own homesteads and in society.

Chapter Six: Gendered Identities and Lasting Impressions

Prisoners and pioneers

> Yes the good old pioneer days, with their lasting memories, are gone forever, but I do not know if any one of us, since reaching this age of advancement, would care to go back and live over again those first years of strain and struggle.
>
> Mrs. Deyell

> As I write this I cannot understand how we kept going with the things we had to put up with, yet we seemed to think it was part of the plan.
>
> Margaret Smith

As these accounts by homestead women show, some women lived their lives self-consciously. They were aware of the significance of what they were doing as they migrated to the Canadian west and set up a homestead. They were self-conscious enough to construct narratives of varying types to record and explain daily life as they negotiated it and as they remembered it. These acknowledgements of the parts they played in the larger scheme of western settlement reflect a confidence and a self-knowledge rarely seen in most biographical accounts of prairie women. Where the first generation of homestead women often appear as two dimensional icons in most prairie history, flat and part of the landscape, if they appear at all, this group of women demonstrated through their own words that women were vital three-dimensional actors on ever changing tableaux, and, indeed, frequently the principals in each scene.

If we read the words of prairie homestead women and listen to them with care, we hear the variations in their experiences as well as the main theme. While the substance of many homestead women's lives was similar, the ways in which women responded to the demands of homesteading and how they felt about their new life on the prairies, differ substantially. Differences can be attributed to socioeconomic class, to time and place of settlement, to education, to individual character, and to knowledge of farming. They can also be attributed to how their past lives shaped the ways women chose to live on the prairies.

In the American West, as one author has described it,[1] there was an unspoken pact that you did not ask about someone's past; that what he or she was or did before did not matter. Some point to this social behaviour as evidence of the great democratic and individualistic spirit of the frontier. The Canadian West appears to have been different. While some of the "new freedoms" of the Canadian prairies entailed a casting off of social conventions and a narrowness of lifestyle that women particularly had found stifling, the past travelled with most of the migrants who came to settle in the Canadian West. The past continued to define who the settler was and how she adapted to the new challenges before her. It determined the kind of demands that would be placed upon her by others, and the resources she might have to make of her life what she wished it to be. The past was an essential part of creating difference in the present.

One of the legacies of the past that was reinforced on the prairies, rather than improved, was the economic dependency and vulnerability of married women. While it was possible for women to break away from a harmful relationship and strike out on their own, the very limited opportunities available to women to support themselves and their children often made this choice seem an impossible one. The fact that she owned nothing gained through her hard labour during marriage meant that she walked away with no resources to start a new life. In reality, many women saw themselves as economic prisoners. Some women who wished to return to their homeland could not because there was no money for travel. They were prisoners in their own homes. The words that Mary Lubchyk used through a translator, to describe this sense of being trapped and unable to do anything about it are memorable:

> She said whenever somebody came to Canada it was just as though they disappeared, fell in the water or something, because there was no way of getting back to the Ukraine so they had to stay here . . . (Lubchyk 1925)

Even if the marriage relationship was stable and satisfying, the feeling of economic bondage, where what is important to one's body and soul is never considered a priority, persisted for many women. As Beatrice Whitehair wrote about her life on the farm:

> A little log cabin, but it didn't look like it because the logs were underneath. . . . I was always fighting the weather, always. And we did all sorts of things to

> make it warm and we were always going to build, but the farm needed. It's got the biggest mouth, a farm has. And when you're starting you've got to get implements and you've got to get beasties. . . . That was always first. **I was never got** and thirty years we lived in it . . . and all the time fighting the weather, you'd put a little more on somewhere else where the cold could come in . . . (Whitehair 1915-1945)

And homestead life became equated for many women with giving up the things that other women in other lifestyles took for granted:

> Somehow . . . I've quit wanting anything for myself, except the things to make it better for the babies. . . . I can't imagine myself on a homestead after having enjoyed a few of the luxuries of life. . . . I'm afraid I'm too fond of my ease to make a good homesteader. (Mary Tennis 1926-)

These women were also prisoners of their emotions. One of the most common references throughout women's accounts is how they hid their feelings and their tears from their husbands and their children. And because close friends, particularly other women whom they might see on a regular basis, were a rarity among this group, there were no human beings with whom their darkest feelings could be shared. Letters and diaries had to suffice, but even these were written with some care, because they knew they would be read by someone else. Maria Potter described an experience common to most homestead women when she expressed the confidence "I confess that sometimes tears were shed but I was careful that my husband should never know that." (Potter 1884-) Whether women felt compelled to be the emotional stronghold of the family, or whether they felt the futility, or potential damage to family solidarity that their tears represented, is not clear. It was perhaps a time and place in history when nobody was allowed to cry in front of others.

"You've just got to make up your mind to adjust, because there is really lots of things you miss of course . . . but we did our best . . . " wrote Alice Self.(Self 1912-) "We did our best" perhaps describes this group of women most appropriately. For if women were prisoners of circumstance, they were pioneers of necessity. The fact that they had to stay and make the best of it brought out a resolve and an approach to life that at times surprised even themselves. As Lillian Turner wrote soon after her arrival in December

1912, "There were a lot of people left for the East today. It made me feel like coughing when the train pulled out. I don't know if I'm going to stand it or not but I guess I'll have to."(Turner 1906) Stories of women settling in the American West have characterized them as reluctant pioneers [2] or as women oppressed by their husbands.[3] While these may appropriately describe a few individual women in this group studied, as a group they can be more aptly described as pioneers of necessity. The necessity to marry, and the necessity to deal with whatever situations the marriage placed them in. These women found themselves in situations that demanded courage, resourcefulness and skills that they had never had to call on before. They responded because they had to, there was no other choice. Lives and livelihoods were at stake. In responding they discovered a new sense of themselves that they liked: a feeling of competence, of usefulness, of indispensability, of personal power.

Their pioneering was a series of private small victories and accomplishments, achieved on a daily basis, as they learned to conquer their fears, live with their loneliness, and to endure the relentless demands on their bodies to perform endless work and to carry and bear children. At the same time what was pioneering for one woman was not always for another, and each found individual challenges in different aspects of homestead life. As Esme Tuck acknowledged in her memoirs after an account of a brush fire she had put out by herself: "I record this simply to show what hazards women had to face and deal with. These things in one form or another happened to all of us." (Tuck 1919-)

The first generation of homestead women were also pioneers of cooperative social action, to better conditions in their own lives and communities, and to improve the status of farm women in law. That these contributions of their generation are less well known than they should be is not surprising. The erasure of women's reform efforts in historical representations is characteristic of many cultures. In reconstruction of the suffrage campaign years for example, some historians have overlooked the fact that farm women in both Saskatchewan and Alberta initiated the demands for suffrage in petitions to provincial governments that began in 1905.[4] The fact that these petitions were gathered by interested and determined women independent of the structures of provincial organizations, which were formed later, makes their efforts more significant. In this group

of seventy-eight women, several commented on the need for women to achieve the vote as soon as possible. A number of these women participated in the political education and lobbying activities of the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers, the United Farm Women of Alberta and the Womens' Institutes as these organizations formed locals in their communities.[5]

The pioneering efforts of homestead women in social improvement and reform are a significant contribution to the maturity of the new provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Women were working together of necessity, and out of a sense of injustice. Their survival depended on some of the services they demanded, their identities as women depended on recognition in law for their citizenship and for what was rightly theirs as a result of their labour.

Gendered Identities

> And it seemed so very hard that while men can so easily obtain everything that is bad for them, women may not have even the very few things that are good for them.
>
> Georgina Binnie-Clark

In homestead life, the intersection of past traditions and adaptation to new challenges and opportunities created some contradictions, both for men and for women. The contradictions in homesteading women's lives on the prairie stand out quite clearly. It is because of these contradictions that we understand the patterns of similarity and of difference between men's lived experiences and those of women. Without these contradictions the patterns of gendered identity as they are lived, understood and adopted in the process of migration, settlement, and proving up a homestead would be obscured, or at least harder to discern. These patterns show how power and privilege were operative in men and women's lives, how risk and personal safety were managed, and how fulfilment of intimacy and personal needs were negotiated. They also show how women attempted to redefine the situations in which they found themselves, and their identities as

women homesteaders, by seeking reform in law, and more balanced partnerships at home.

Perhaps the most compelling of these contradictions is women's work on the homestead in relation to their claim to the land, to their home and its improvements. While women's work was essential to the survival of the family and of the enterprise, and contributed significantly to the increased prosperity of both, it did not warrant any recognition in law, nor often in society. This tradition is easily understood if legal history is examined. However, it cannot be explained away as a careful adherence to tradition when tradition elsewhere was being abandoned and successfully replaced,[6] and when the injustice of the law was being called into question by men and women alike. While reinforcing a patriarchal society in which men controlled most of the assets of both the family and the state, this practice also had two other effects. It galvanized women to seek a variety of political and legal reforms, from suffrage,[7] to prohibition, to dower laws and community property law. Some of these were successful, but the concept of community property was abandoned because "public opinion"[8] was against it. In reality, public sentiment was well girded by the socialization of men and women to believe that marriage was not a partnership of equals, and that any rearrangement of property rights that would make them so would disrupt the social order. The entrenchment of this socialization process was the second effect. The farm or ranch woman remained an unpaid and overworked employee in her husband's business, and the law reinforced the views of subsequent generations that this was just the way it was. In 1984, only forty percent of Alberta farm women reported that they had any legal partnership with their husbands in the family enterprise.[9] This aspect of gendered identities of farm and ranch women enjoyed a long unchallenged history. The effect on individual women was varied, as this research has shown. When some of the first generation of women homesteaders rose up with confidence and assertion to claim what was rightly theirs, and these attempts failed, this failure too is a significant part of the gendered identities of women of this generation. They learned the true value placed on their contributions to settling the prairies, and they learned the place of women in prairie society, as the male hegemony in farming and politics viewed it and enforced it. The blatant contradiction between the "helpmate" image

of a farm woman and the indispensability of her labour to the farm's viability remained a potent cultural artifact. [10]

For some women, a way of resisting the imbalance between work and privilege was to redefine work roles as soon as it was possible to do so, retreating from double duty into the specialised roles of parent and homemaker. This specialization gave some women a power base of their own, a place for a feeling of control and competence essential to their well-being. It was a way of redefining the partnership to achieve some level of equity with their husbands. It was also consistent with their inherited understanding of women's appropriate work role, despite the fact that they had practised a broader range of work activities in their own lives. Rather than viewing this as a defeat of women's attempts to get out of the kitchen and be full-fledged partners of the enterprise, it may be more appropriate to see it as a practical way for women to have more of a life of their own, and to resist the role of being always on call as their husband's unrecognized assistant. Another way of resisting the imbalance was through their children. While male children were encouraged to pursue farming as a livelihood, female children were actively discouraged from it. Concerns about rural depopulation, centred on the migration of homesteader's children to schools and jobs in urban centres, were raised relatively early in the settlement years. Women admitted that they discouraged their daughters from following in their footsteps, and social commentators agreed that the farm would have little appeal for young women whose examples of farm partnerships were their mothers' lives.[11] Another strategy of resistance was to leave the farm, and some women were able to persuade their partners to do so. If she was unwilling to stay, he was unable to, and some men respected their wives' feelings and abandoned the homestead in search of a better life for both of them.

A companionate contradiction to the one about property rights is the position in which many homestead women found themselves with respect to money. While many women worked throughout their years on the homestead to earn cash from butter, eggs, cream, chickens, sewing and other crafts, a significant number of these women had no say about how the money their labour earned would be spent, and the law granted these earnings to the husband. The heart of this contradiction is the definition of family. A farm woman's

wage earning work was directed at the survival of her family, both in real terms in the way of food and clothing, and in terms of the family's livelihood, by providing funds to keep the farm going. The wife and mother of the family was given this responsibility as an adult family member, but no authority to go with it. Family authority rested in only one person, her husband. So women of this generation who experienced this authority structure often devised ways to circumvent or manipulate this authority, to get some of the things for themselves and their children they needed and wanted. Some had to rely on help from relatives because they could not influence their husbands. Others suffered in silence. Others worked even harder, learning to secretly keep or asserting their right to keep some of the funds the products of their labour earned. All of these strategies became part of what they understood a woman does, and what her entitlements were. The effort to educate men "as to what constitutes true home partnership"[12] was also part of the strategies homestead women employed. These initiatives, to "convert and convince our husbands"[13] was aided by a woman's thorough knowledge of the farm, and her role as family bookkeeper and record keeper. Herein lies the most frustrating contradiction for many homestead women: while they were entrusted with the responsibility to keep track of farm or ranch finances, and indeed, to pay bills and hired help and collect debts from neighbours, they were not entrusted with spending any funds of their own, or on their own, on shopping day.

Other contradictions arise out of the responsibility/authority mismatch of women's lives. While homestead women had most, if not all, the responsibility for the care and welfare of their children, until 1920, married women had no legal authority with respect to their own children. The division of labour with respect to children is very clear in women's accounts, and the addition of each child increased women's work and women's need to be close to home. What is also evident is the joy and sense of purpose that children brought to women's lives. It not surprising that two of the women who boast about the freedom of homestead life most enthusiastically were women without children. The responsibility of children was enormous and central to how women viewed themselves and their lives. Inherent contradictions, such as the joy of children's company and the restricted mobility and hence isolation from other women that children brought to women's lives; and the fact that the demands of the farm itself took mothers away from their children and

jeopardized children's safety, were accepted by most homestead women. What they found unacceptable was the fact that despite their twenty-four hour a day responsibility for the health, education and well-being of their children, the law did not consider them as their legal guardians.

The responsibility women felt for their children brings another contradiction to light. Historical interpretations of the community-building activities of women assign these efforts to a notion of women's attempts to civilize the frontier, and in so doing of course, "civilize" men.[14] But these women in their accounts show that women's concerns about the men in their lives weren't about making them more socially refined. The significant efforts women invested in founding churches and schools, developing clubs and social traditions had two motives: self-preservation; and concern that their children not grow up without some of the things their mothers had in their childhoods. As much as women's pioneering efforts in building communities benefited everyone, most of this work was motivated by a survival instinct, a need to preserve and to provide some of the things that were important to women. Some men certainly also felt these things were important and they initiated many community institutions. Many of the projects were accomplished cooperatively, men and women working together. In women's concern for a better life however, men were the last things on their mind. They were acting on behalf of their children, in response to the responsibilities for their children's welfare they had assumed and which their husbands expected them to fulfil.

Other contradictions have emerged in this research that give us an opportunity to learn how women defined appropriate feminine behaviour and how this changed over time. A proper woman had to work like a man while dressed like a woman: in skirts, never in pants. Women had to be conscious of their appearance and would never appear off the farm in their work clothes, unless they were the only clothes they had. Some women discarded the feminine dress codes easily, particularly after World War One, as Esme Tuck's example shows. Esme did so though, only at the suggestion of her husband. Deference to men's preferences was one of the behaviours that kept women in clothing inappropriate to their vocation. Women were expected to be the same as men - just as adept at climbing into the wagon, riding the horse, milking the cow, - while maintaining

standards of difference, in dress, and in behaviour, that made their efforts to be equally competent twice as difficult. But it was important to these women that their men see them as women and how a woman looked was central to their ideas of womanhood.

Other contradictions emerge when we look at the competencies women achieved and that were expected of them. Women were expected to be able to manage the homestead alone, sometimes for weeks at a time. This meant dealing with any crisis, stranger or natural disaster that came along. Some of these same women however, were not allowed to drive alone to visit a neighbour or attend a women's meeting. While this appears as a blatant contradiction, at another level of analysis, it is an example of perfect consistency. Women had to be at home, taking care of everything, because men could not manage without them, particularly at meal time. This demand to be always on duty to make men's lives easier survived well into the 1980's for many farm women.[15] Several authors have written that women have always been influential in maintaining a class of people attached to the land.[16] Perhaps that statement should be revised to say that women were the only class of people attached to the land and that men were just the landlords.

Homestead women's emotional lives reveal some interesting contradictions. Women felt some expectation to be emotionally strong and self-sufficient. Whether this was how they understood they should carry out their role as wife and mother, or whether this was a particular response to the homestead experience is not clear. Esme Tuck, for example, attributed her training in cheerful optimism to her mother. Others felt that they had made a choice and they might as well make the best of it. But all seemed to believe that they had to take care of their negative feelings by themselves, and at the same time provide emotional comfort to others whose morale was low. Two contradictions come to mind. While in many cases it was the wife and mother who was making the most adjustments, both material and emotional, to homestead life, she was the one in the family with the fewest opportunities to find outlets for her emotions, in the forms of meaningful friendships or conversations, and social activities, and who as a consequence was most cut off from sources of emotional support. The second contradiction is that the conditions in which women worked and lived were possibly the most impossible ones in which to maintain a cheerful, happy outlook on life. Homestead women were never free of worries of one kind

or another, and usually there were many things at once to be concerned about, most of them relating to the essentials needed to survive. Women often had no one to talk to about many of things with which they were dealing. Men and women approached homestead life differently, and that difference produced some emotional distance between them. As Harriet Neville wrote:

> Everyone was excited for the snow began to melt and next week we would separate each one going to a new home . . . on the homestead. Where this was few could tell. Perhaps they knew the number of the section, range, etc., but otherwise only that it might be near the North Pole. The men knew of course but the women had other things to store in their memories.(Neville, 1882-1905,27)

Although there is some suggestion in women's accounts that men and women who homesteaded together became emotionally close because they only had each other, and many trials to face together, it appears that for many homestead women, being a woman meant being profoundly alone to deal with one's emotional needs and crises. This need to cope alone, and to be stoic emotionally became a behaviour their daughters learned from homestead women, and in turn, passed on. It would become identified as a desirable quality of womanhood rather than remembered as a temporary adaptation to a particular situation forced upon the first generation of homesteading women.

The "new woman" of Canadian prairie culture was a woman with an identity formed in her past and reshaped to suit the demands and contradictions of settlement life. Her identity is one bound up with loss, with loneliness, with personal empowerment and with social invisibility and powerlessness. She was a woman in whom the tensions between the old and new, the freedoms and constraints, the equal responsibilities and accompanying legal inequalities were lived and felt on a daily basis. She was by her presence and her performance a reformer, and yet unable to change many of the things that mattered most to her.

These contradictions are essential to understanding gender relations for homesteading men and women. It is important to recognize the material position of women in prairie homestead culture in order to understand their ideological position, which for many

observers seems invisible and natural. What is situational, specific to a time and place, and to a specific economic structure, becomes embedded culturally, despite womens' attempts to address their positions, both materially and ideologically. It is therefore not the gendered identities of individual women, who resist and refine social prescriptions for their sex, arising out of a tradition of dominance in social relations between men and women, that survive and inform our historical interpretations. Instead an almost mythical woman arises, created in literature and in popular history, who bears some resemblance to the homestead women studied here, but becomes an archetype of the cultural prescriptions for her sex. Unfortunately it is she who is the lasting female image of our understanding of prairie homesteading.

Lasting impressions

> That is how we worked along but it was not as easy as it looks in writing. We were often tired and sometimes not very well.
>
> Harriet Neville

It is important to consider why this understanding of homestead women's lives, as ones full of contradictions, and a broad range of positive and negative life experiences, has not been part of our cultural knowledge. Even more hidden are the continual campaigns homestead women waged, at home, in their communities and in provincial legislatures, to address some of the injustices they felt, and to acquire some of the basic services they needed for the well-being of themselves and their families.

Some may feel they are days best forgotten. These sentiments have been expressed by homesteading women themselves. But historical amnesia is not nearly as problematic as rewriting history in distorted forms. For somehow out of the diversity and the richness of the lives of the first generation of homesteading women has emerged a mythical pioneer woman with qualities bestowed on her that defy the words women themselves have written, and the lives that they lived. For now we have the prairie saint, a woman strong in

physique and character, always loving and helpful, whose life is devoted to serving others, and who despite the hardships of her life on the prairies, is always happy and fulfilled. Where did she come from? As evident by the Christmas greetings of the Grain Growers' Guide to homestead women in 1909, which called them the "sisterhood of the selfless heart and abiding courage" this ideal of the prairie woman has deep roots in the culture in which it was created. It is not just a retrospective construction of those removed from the homesteading years. This mythical woman is also a creation of the generations that follow this first generation. Perhaps because their mothers' emotional lives were hidden from them, children of homestead women recreate their mothers in idealized forms, representing more the happy carefree lives the children themselves enjoyed on the prairies, than their mothers' realities. The bulk of prairie history, particularly of the settlement years, is written by children or grandchildren of homesteaders. This mythical woman is also a product of ideologues, usually those with political motives, whose knowledge of women's lives is limited and who seize the opportunity that idealized versions of historical experience present, essentially an opportunity to rationalize an agenda of social control. And so these women become what one would like them to be.

What purpose has the mythical pioneer woman served in our society? Her image allows us to forget, indeed never to confront, four critical historical realities: homestead women's lives were often difficult, and at times rewarded them meagrely with satisfaction and fulfilment; homestead women were treated with great injustice by the laws of the land, both provincial and federal; prairie settlement was effectively accomplished at higher cost to women than to men; and men would not have been successful homesteaders without the work of women, thus men were dependent on women to accomplish their goals. We need false images of women to prop up false images of men in history. And in perpetuating both, we lose some essential understandings: of women's and men's lives as they lived them, of the nature of relations between men and women, and of the ways in which the homestead experience shaped the practice of both manhood and womanhood on the Canadian prairies. Without these understandings, the idealized and inaccurate images become our historical inheritance.

Avenues for further research

This research is an attempt to present homestead experiences in Saskatchewan and Alberta from the perspectives and reflections of the women who lived them. We are fortunate that the sources women have provided contain a richness of detail, and an emotional content that allow us to question the popular imagery of pioneer women dominant in western Canadian culture. A fuller understanding of this first generation of women who established prairie societies, and how they lived, worked and loved, offers us some insights into the cultural messages about womanhood that dominated five decades of prairie life.

The unique characteristic of settlement in Saskatchewan and Alberta, unlike the other provinces of Canada, was that the bulk of immigration to the area took place in the twentieth century. The ways that men and women lived and worked together on homesteads is only two or three generations away from young parents of today. It is important to take new understandings of homestead women's lives and compare them to the imagery of homestead women popular in prairie culture through the generations. We need to examine the process of myth making and the effect of pioneer myths on cultural prescriptions for men and women that have survived through the twentieth century.

This study points to other areas where research is warranted and needed. The relationship between the indigenous peoples of the prairies and the migrants who came to ranch and farm there is an underdeveloped area of prairie history. There is evidence in several studies,[17] including this one, that there were significant connections between the groups, and mutual interdependencies of varying natures. The extent and character of these relations bear more detailed examination.

Another aspect of homestead life that appears only sporadically in these accounts is the role of religion for these generations of settlers. While church services were often infrequent, if available at all, and often served as much a social function as a religious one, the importance of religious belief and its purpose in people's lives requires some exploration. It is particularly important to look at adherence to religious belief as it

influenced other aspects of homestead life, including power structures of families, family planning, and the attitudes and values with which men and women approached their work and family responsibilities, and constructed their identities as mothers, fathers, men and women.

The intimate relationships that prairie men and women of this period shared is not well exposed in the sources used in this research. The care some women took to guard their privacy in letters and memoirs, and even for some in diaries, precluded the inclusion of emotional confidences or strong feelings. This was not true for every one of the seventy-eight women, but was a general pattern. Sophie Puckette's diaries are one of the exceptions. They chronicle the emotional ups and downs of a young woman torn between career aspirations and her interest in a certain young man who lived on the neighbouring homestead. Her diaries suggest life on the prairies, of necessity, modified some of the courtship behaviours to which women were accustomed. To date, historical work on the prairies has not looked at the courtship and marriage customs during the settlement years in any depth, outside of particular ethnic groups.[18] The potential to understand changing gender norms and expectations, and the evolution of prairie society, as women and men come together in new and unfamiliar circumstances is the promise of this line of research.

Women's accounts used in this research also mentioned children in ways that give us more of a functional, rather than emotional perspective of their experiences of motherhood. While women declared their joys and sorrows related to the care of children and the loss of them, at childbirth or through illness, the kinds of relationships they shared with their children were not discernable. Because maternity was central to many homestead women's lives, and because popular imagery of prairie homestead women usually includes maternal images (a contemporary statue of a pioneer woman in Regina shows her embracing a child in one arm, and a sheaf of wheat in the other), a more indepth look at the motherhood experiences of homestead women, including their political advocacy on behalf of children's welfare, would be a useful and interesting direction for research.

We also need to understand more about the construction of gendered identities for men in prairie culture, and how popular ideas of masculinity and of fatherhood reflect mythical images of frontier manhood. More research in this area would enable the development of a more complete analysis of gender relations as a political and social force in prairie society.

Notes - Chapter One

1. There are notable exceptions to this general situation, and some of those accounts by women that have been published are included in this study. See the entries labelled "PM" in the Primary Sources list of the Bibliography. There are published works which have not been included, but in comparison to the large body of pioneer accounts, women's autobiographical works are very small in number. Eliane Silverman has developed her book The last best west: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930 from oral history interviews conducted with one hundred and thirty women who migrated to Alberta. Most of these women were not homesteaders.

2. While it is true that some men did homestead on their own, usually for one year, but sometimes for up to three years before bringing their wives to the homestead, the conditions that greeted women when they arrived were, in most cases, not substantially better than when their husbands first arrived. The one difference would be that a shelter of some kind would have been built, so that their wives would not have to live in a tent upon arrival.

3. Success rates can be determined in several ways. The federal government was concerned about how many homestead claims "proved up" by the end of the compulsory three year period. A federal government report in 1916 estimated the success rate, on this basis, at 54%. Chester Martin calculated a homestead failure rate of 47% in Alberta (1905-1930) and 57% in Saskatchewan (1911-1930). Other estimates are based on how many people stayed on the land after proving up, that is, they became residents for a period of time. One of these estimates suggests only two out of five families stayed on the land they had claimed. Women in this study are in families that had every intention to stay, but in some cases did not, as well as families who wanted to develop the homestead and sell it.

4. In some accounts, "homestead" refers only to farming operations, either grain farming or mixed farming, but specifically not to ranching. Ranchers in the early years complained about the arrival of "homesteaders", whose claims to the land and cultivation of it ruined the free range grazing practices of ranchers. In this study, I have used homestead to mean a home and enterprise that developed where one did not exist before, either a farm or a ranch, and one in which the "home quarter" of 160 acres was registered as a homestead claim.

5. Gillian Bottomley has published research on the relationship between migration and the erosion of patriarchal authority in the family in Australia. The process of adaptation to a new environment could also serve to entrench some gender norms in new ways.

6. I have borrowed this concept from R. W. Connell, Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987).

7. These categories of relations within the family are also borrowed from R. W. Connell, Gender and power.Society, the person and sexual politics (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987).

8. C. Smith-Rosenberg, Disorderly conduct: Visions of gender in Victorian America (New York: Knopf, 1985), p. 29.

9. The Canada Year Book (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1936).

10. K. Norrie and D. Owram, A history of the Canadian economy (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1991), p. 325.

11. L. Stanley, On auto/biography in sociology, Sociology 27, no. 1 (1993), p. 50.

12. E. C. Jelinek, Women's autobiography (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

13. Recent work in this area includes:
    S. Armitage and E. Jameson, (Eds.) The women's west (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

    C. J. Foote, Women of the New Mexico Frontier. 1846-1912 (Niwot, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1990).

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    M. Neth, Preserving the family farm: Farm families and communities in the midwest, 1900-1940 (Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Wisconsin. Madison, Wisconsin, 1987).

    N. G. Osterud, Bonds of community. The lives of farm women in nineteenth century New York (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

    L. Schlissel, Women's diaries of the westward journey (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

    J. L. Stratton, Pioneer women. Voices from the Kansas frontier (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

14. N. L. Langford, Politics, pitchforks and pickle jars. Seventy-five years of organized farm women in Alberta (forthcoming).

15. P. Voisey, Rural local history and the prairie west: Prairie Forum 10, no. 2 (1985), pp. 327-380.

16. The British Sociological Association devoted one special issue of their journal Sociology to research on "Biography and Autobiography in Sociology" in 1993.

Notes - Chapter Two

1. This aspect of migration to a new home is also demonstrated in lives of settlers in the American west and south-west. See Foote (1993) and Harris (1993).

2. Government of Canada, Census of Prairie Provinces, 1916. p. xiii.

3. Examples of this kind of literature are:

   M. Cran A woman in Canada (London: W. J. Ham-Smith, 1910).

   F. Low, Openings for British Women in Canada (London: William Stevens, n.d.).

   E. K. Morris, An Englishwoman in the Canadian West (London: Simpkin Marshall, 1913).

4. Government of Canada, Census of Prairie Provinces, 1916. p. xv.

5. S. Sundberg, A female frontier: Manitoba farm women in 1922 Prairie Forum 16 no. 2 (1991), p. 186.

6. B. Welter, The cult of true womanhood: 1820-1860, Women's experience in America: An anthology (New York: New Brunswick E. Katz and A. Rapone (Eds.), 1980), p. 200.

7. R. Steen and M. Hendrickson, Pioneer Days in Bardo, Alberta (Tofield, Alberta: The Historical Society of Beaver Hills Lake, n.d.), p. 165.

8. op cit. p. 203

Notes - Chapter Three

1. See B. S. Anderson and J. P. Zinsser, A history of their own: Women in Europe from prehistory to the present (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

2. Hamilton - see bibliog p. 90

3. G. Friesen, The Canadian Prairies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 319.

4. S. Sundberg, The female frontier. Prairie Forum 16 no. 2 (1991), pp. 185-204.

5. Personal communication with Edith Butler.
Reference to a Saskatchewan report (undated and unidentified) states that without electricity, rural sewer and water services were impossible, and even in 1955, electricity was not common in many areas of the province. By 1964, 90% of all farms (about 65,000) were being served, compared to 293 farm homes in 1944.

6. B. S. Anderson and J. P. Zinsser, A history of their own.

7. M. Neth, Preserving the family farm.

8. Ibid.

9. C. A. Dawson and E. T. Yonge, Pioneering in the prairie provinces: The social side of the settlement process (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1940) p. 16.

10. Some of this rhetoric was in response to concerns about rural depopulation. Duncan Marshall, the Alberta Agriculture Minister in 1916, urged farm women to fill their homes with "comforts and advantages" to "have boys and girls remain there". Women's Institutes Convention Report 1916.

11. Both the United Farm Women of Alberta and the Womens Institutes launched extensive treeplanting and beautification campaigns in the late 1920's, with the goal of making farms more "home-like and enjoyable".

12. L. Dyck, Estimates of farm-making costs in Saskatchewan Prairie Forum 6 no. 2 (1981), pp. 183-201.
Lyle Dyck writes in this article on estimates of farm-making costs in Saskatchewan that a farm operation could be started with as small an amount as $300 to $500, whereas $300 would be grossly insufficient to start a beef herd, or sheep herd, and would likely be enough only to purchase two good horses.

13. Obituaries, Regina Leader Post (April 1928).

Notes - Chapter Four

1. Dates are sometimes approximate because women did not provide specific dates in memoirs, interviews and sometime dates were also missing from letters. The dates in most cases indicate the years the women are writing about. For full information on the sources see the primary sources table in the bibliography and also Appendix A, where women are listed alphabetically. Page numbers were used only in manuscripts of considerable length, and they have been included where possible.

2. A dugout was a house literally dug out of the ground, often the side of a small hill or embankment. An opening for the door, usually covered with tarpaulin, and a small window would provide air and light.
   A shack described any structure made of wood, either lumber or logs. Roofs were often combinations of wood, tarpaper and sod, and occasionally tin over wood with tar paper in between. Tar paper was also used on the walls of the shack for insulation.
   A soddy was a house constructed of sod bricks cut from the prairie grass. The roof usually was also made of sod, supported by wood planking and joists.
   A frame house was the palace of the prairies. Wood frame construction was costly, and frame houses were not as warm and stable as soddies.

3. A fuller discussion of this myth and of the modern experience of social isolation of Alberta farm women is found in N. Langford and N. Keating, Social isolation and Alberta farm women Women: Isolation and Bonding. The Ecology of Gender, K. Storrie (Ed.) (Toronto: Methuen, 1987), pp. 47-58.

4. Judith Leavitt also found this fear and anticipation of death among American women of the same generation. This fear was not just based on prairie conditions, urban women also felt it. It was a reaction to the state of medical capabilities in dealing with the complications of childbirth.
   J. W. Leavitt, Brought to Bed: Childbearing in America 1750 to 1950 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

5. For a full discussion of this professional debate conducted at the national level see: S. Buckley, Ladies or midwives? Efforts to reduce infant and maternal mortality A Not Unreasonable Claim, L. Kealey (Ed.) (Toronto: Women's Educational Press, 1979), pp. 131-149.

6. M. Cran, A Woman in Canada.

7. Statistics on maternal mortality in Canada were not collected until 1921. Maternal mortality was not studied in Canada until 1925. In the period studied, July 1, 1925 to July 1, 1926, there were 1,532 maternal deaths and the 1928 report, Maternal Mortality in Canada (H. MaMurchy, 1928) claimed that "most of these deaths can be prevented". Of these 1,532 women who died, 1,302 had no pre-natal care at all. Septicaemia was the major cause of death, closely followed by haemorage, although this order was reversed in Alberta. The third major cause was toxaemia. In Alberta, there were 111 maternal deaths in both 1921 and 1922, and 84 of these occurred in

rural areas. In 1929 there were 123 maternal deaths in Alberta, 78 of them occurring in rural areas. In Saskatchewan, there were 127 maternal deaths in 1922, 74 of them occurring in rural areas. Until 1933 maternity followed only tuberculosis as the leading cause of death for adult women in Canada.

8. Judith Leavitt also wrote about the traditional female culture of childbirth, and that even when male doctors became a part of the birth experience, they often deferred to the wishes and expertise of the women, both patient and attendants, and often sought their counsel.

9. Infant deaths from premature births, injuries at birth, congenital debility and congenital malformation constitutes 44.6 % of all infants who died under the age of one in Alberta in 1921. This number actually increased in the second part of the decade. The stillbirth rate also increased throughout the 1920's.
In Saskatchewan in 1914, 31% of infant deaths in the first year were neo-natal deaths, and the rate of still births dramatically increased from 1914 to 1916, from 182 to 285. Prenatal care of mothers was cited as a major preventive measure to deal with the high incidence of infant mortality, as well as better obstetric care at birth.

10. M. W. Riskin, The history of the Victorian Order of Nurses in Alberta (Unpublished manuscript, 1992).

11. Saskatchewan Sessional Papers (1924).

12. Ibid.

13. Judith Leavitt's research also demonstrated the long periods, often twenty years or more, during which women were either pregnant or nursing a child. Birth control was unevenly used among women, particularly by women on the prairies, some of whom managed to restrict their families by some means to two or three children, while other women without this knowledge found themselves continually pregnant, having families of as many as fourteen children. Religion, as well as accessibility of birth control and education were determinant of birth control use.

14. See Sharon Thurston's thesis for similar findings about prairie women's relationship to the natural environment.

Notes - Chapter Five

1. In Alberta, the Dower Act of 1917 replaced the flawed Married Women's Home Protection Act of 1915, and the rights given by this legislation applied to the homestead only, not to all property owned by the man during marriage. Saskatchewan's Homestead Act was passed in 1915, and amended twice, once in 1919 and again in 1920, and it also only applied to the homestead. For full discussion of the dower law campaigns, see: C. Cavanaugh, The limitations of the pioneering partnership: The Alberta Campaign for Homestead Dower, 1909-1925 (Canadian Historical Review 74, no. 2 (1991), pp. 198-225.
and
M. McCallum, Prairie women and the struggle for a dower law, 1905-1920 Prairie Forum 18, no. 1 (1993), pp. 19-34.

2. S. Sundberg, A female frontier: Manitoba farm women in 1922. Prairie Forum. 16, no. 2 (1991), p. 196.

3. Personal correspondence of Mrs. E. Stewart, of Milestone, Saskatchewan, to Miss Stocking, of the Women Grain Growers' Association of Saskatchewan, March 18, 1918. Found in the Violet McNaughton Papers, Saskatchewan Archives, Saskatoon.

4. The United Farm Women of Alberta passed a resolution at their 1918 convention: "Whereas women are taxed for the support of the Government the same as the men, and in this present time of stress women are urged to get out on the land to produce food; Therefore we feel that any natural resources that the Government has to put at the disposal of its citizens should be freer to all, irrespective of sex, and "We most respectfully ask that the Homesteading privileges be extended to women on an equality with men".

5. By the time this transfer of control of land and natural resources took place in 1930, very little land was available for homesteading. Alberta passed a law allowing women to claim a homestead after 1930; Saskatchewan did not.

6. Personal correspondence of Mrs. E. Stewart, of Milestone, Saskatchewan, to Miss Stocking, of the Women Grain Growers' Association of Saskatchewan, July 1, 1918. Found in the Violet McNaughton Papers, Saskatchewan Archives, Saskatoon.

7. F. M. Beynon, Marriage and nationality, The Grain Growers' Guide 8 (1914), p. 1108.

8. Official correspondence of Mr. George B. Henwood, Deputy Attorney General of Alberta, in response to letter from Florence Williams of Metiskow Alberta, March 9, 1939. Found in Attorney-General's files. Provincial Archives of Alberta.

9. Elizabeth Clark, in a letter to Premier Scott of Saskatchewan, January 16, 1913, sent from Nanaimo British Columbia. Files of the Premier's office. Saskatchewan Archives, Regina. Clark found her legal status as a homesteader so "humiliating" that she and her husband abandoned their homestead.

10. Mrs. Wyman, Convenor of Laws, United Farm Women of Alberta. "Laws concerning women and children". A report to provincial convention, 1924.

Notes - Chapter Six

1. K. Harris, Long vistas: Women and families in Colorado homesteads (Niwot, Colorado: University of Colorado, 1993).

2. Ibid, chapter 1.

3. Ibid.

4. Evidence for this statement is found in the suffrage petitions to both governments filed in provincial archives.

5. See N. Langford, "All that glitters": The political apprenticeship of Alberta women, 1916-1930, Standing on new ground: Women in Alberta, C. Cavenaugh and R. Warne (Eds.) (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993).

6. Single women in Colorado, for example, were granted homesteads under the 1862 Homestead Act, land which they could keep in their own names upon marriage, and women were equally successful at claiming their homestead patents as men.

7. The significance of the suffrage campaign for farm and ranch women was that they believed it was a way for them to bring about the legislative changes they desired, particularly those dealing with property rights of married women and rights of guardianship of mothers. It therefore was not a "right to vote" movement for them as much as "a vote to get rights" movement.

8. See C. Cavanaugh, The limitation of the pioneering partnership: The Alberta campaign for homestead dower, Canadian Historical Review 74, no. 2 (1993), pp. 198-225.

9. N. Keating M. Doherty A study of Alberta farmers (Edmonton: Agricultural Research Council of Alberta, 1985.

10. See S. Sundberg, Farm women on the Canadian prairie frontier: The helpmate image, Rethinking Canada: The promise of women's history, V. Strong-Boag and A. C. Fellman (Eds.) (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1986).

11. Keeping the girls on the farm, The Grain Growers Guide. 4 (March 9), p. 28.

12. Catharine Motherwell, Domestic bookkeeping, Grain Growers' Guide (1911).

13. Ibid.

14. Beginning with Frederick Jackson Turner's essay on "The significance of the Frontier in Western History" in 1894, this view of women's contribution to frontier life would be influential in prairie historical interpretations for decades.

15. See N. Langford, Social isolation of Alberta farm women.

16. L. M. Robinson, Agrarian reformers: Women and the farm movement in Alberta 1909-1925 (unpublished thesis, University of Calgary, 1979), p. 10 and C. Sachs, The invisible farmers: Women in agricultural production (Totawa, New Jersey: Towan & Allenheld, 1983).

17. S. Evans, "Upstairs downstairs" in the foothills of Alberta.

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S - Saskatchewan Archives
PA - Provincial Archives of Alberta
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Ellen Lowes (McFadden)	S26	SHS 148, SHS 235	Memoirs "The Diary of Ellen McFadden Lowes"
Mary Lubchyk	PA.9	81.279/128	Oral history Interview by E. Silverman
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Sophie Puckette (later Sophie Miles)	GB.7	M843	Diaries donated by Margaret Hanlan, daughter
Alice Rendell	S.6	S F175.4	Letters to friends some published in Alberta Historical Review 11 (Winter 1963) 12-27 "Letters from a Barr Colonist"
Emma Richards (Troth)	S31	R-E589	Memoirs written in 1943 donated by Stanley Richards
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PM - Published Manuscript
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NAME	NO	ACC NO.	TYPE OF MATERIAL AND COPYRIGHT/DONOR
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Evelyn Cartier Springett	PM.7		For my Children's Children. Montreal: The Unity Press. 1937.
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APPENDIX A

INFORMATION ON HOMESTEAD WOMEN

NAME	NO	ORIGINS	LOCATION	F/R	DATES	BIRTHDATE	STATUS
Clarissa Althouse	S16	Stoney Creek, Ontario	Handel, Saskatchewan	F	1907		M
Lena Kernen Bacon	S14	Nebraska	17 miles southwest of Girvin	F	1904-1908		W
Mary Bailey	PM.9	Ontario	Leslieville, Alberta	F	1904-1908		SF
Edna Banks	S15	Ontario	between Morse and Swift Current, Saskatchewan	F	1911-		S*
Mabel Barker	PA.5	Ontario	Shepard, Alberta	F	1912	1891-1993	SF
Grace Graham Bartsch	GB18	Chicago, Ill	Klondike, Hussar	R/F	1901	1871-1959	M
Georgina Binnie-Clark	PM.1	Dorset, England	Fort Qu'appelle, Saskatchewan	F	1905-1908 1913	1871-1947	S
Mrs. Robert Buchanan	S27	Goderich, Ontario	8 miles east of Qu'appelle, then Devil's Lake	F/R	1883-1905		MC
Henrietta Campbell (Henrietta Lawrie Barclay)	S35	Onslow Corners, Quebec Born in Dumfermline, Scotland	Ogema and Davon areas, Burstall area		1916-1964	1900- Came to Canada in 1910 as hired girl	S
Mrs. H. H. Cayford	S18	USA	Langevin, Assinboia (Aldersen, Alberta) then moved to Battleford area, Saskatchewan	R	1902-1922		MC

No - see Primary Sources in Bibliography
F - Farm
R - Ranch
Dates - refers to the years being written about
( ) - denotes birth name

M - Married
MC - Married with children
S - Single
S* - Single on arrival, but married within one year
SF - Single, arrived with family of origin
W - Widowed

NAME	NO	ORIGINS	LOCATION	F/R	DATES	BIRTHDATE	STATUS
Gertrude Chase	PA.4	Howillah, Washington State USA	Harcourt Alberta Wapiti River Area	F	1918-1923	1891-	MC
Elizabeth Rockford Covey	PM.3	England	Qu'appelle Valley, Saskatchewan	F	1899-		SF
Mary Louisa Cummins	S28	London, England	Grenfell	F	1883-	1860-1939	MC
Mary Dawes	PA.7	London, England	outside Calgary	F	1922-		MC
Mrs. John Deyell	S25	Ontario	Alameda, Sask	F	came in 1885, married in 1887		S
Mrs. Joseph Donaldson	S34	England	Broadview, Assiniboia, NWT	F	1887		MC
Mrs. R. Duthie	GB25	Ontario	14 miles from Pincher Creek - Alberta Ranch	R	1884	1867	S*
Mrs. Wallace T. Eddy	GB28	London, England	Butte Ranch (then Willow Ranch, Pincher Creek)	R			S*
Mary Edey	PA.3	Ottawa, Ontario	Cayley, Alberta	F	1914	1895-	M
Kaja Froyen	PA16	Montevideo, Minnesota	Lake DeMay 1904-1909 (central Alberta) Ferry Point 1910-1913	F	1904-1913		M
Mabel Hawthorne (Lockerby)	S17	Ottawa	Harris, Saskatchewan	F	1906-1918		MC
Peggy Holmes	PM.6	Hull, England	Ranch - Southern Alberta then 30 mi from Ashmont, Alberta	F	1919-1925		M

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Monica Hopkins (Amy Monica Maggs)	PM12	Dorset, England	Priddis, Alberta 9 mi southwest	R	1909-1911	1884-1974	M
Mary Ella Inderwick (Lees)	GB.6	Perth, Ontario	North Fork Ranch near Cowley, Alberta	R	1884-1888	1859-?	S*
Mrs. William Ireland	GB14	Desmoines, Iowa	Oyen, Alberta	F	1910	1882-	M
Hilda Kirkland (Ridsdale)	S19	London	Qu'appelle District	F	1895-1905		M
Mary B. Lawrence (Walter)	GB.9	Rossville,Indiana	Fort Vermilion	F	1898-1907	1875-after1929	M
Edith Lawry	PA.6	Scotland	Inverness (22 miles from Didsbury	F	1919-1925	1890-	M
Ellen Lowes (McFadden)	S26	Manitoba	Qu'appelle district, Saskatchewan	F/R	1882-1900		M
Mary Lubchyk	PA.9	Ukraine	Near Boyle, Alberta 30 miles from Athabasca	F	1925-		S*
Mabel Mandane Leland (Stebbins)	GB17	Benton, New York	Fort Pitt, Sask.	F	1913	1878-after 1954	MC
Amelia Frances Lucas (Aylwin)	GB11	Aylmer, Quebec	Ponoka	F	1903-1904	Died in 1918	MC
Katharine Gertrude MacNamee	S11	farm in North Dakota	16 miles from Kuroki, Saskatchewan	F	1906	1887-	M
Eliza Mary May (Paice)	GB23	Berkshire, England Romsgate	Stanford Ranch 10 miles west of Calgary	R	1888-		S*

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Mary J. McCheane (Saunders)	S.9	Birmingham, England	Borden, Saskatchewan	F	1907 (joined father) 1916- married	1891	SF
Florence McDermott	S10	Minnesota	Near Biggar, Saskatchewan	F	1914-	1896	M
Jennie McLean	GB10	Bowmanville, Ontario	Mannville (Irma), Alberta	F	1908-1910	1880-after 1960	SF
Clara Middleton first marriage Clara Jackson (Russell)	PM10	London, England	Carstairs (3 years in North Dakota first)	F	1904-	1872-	M
Helen Alice Julia Millar (Shaw)	GB.3	England	Millarville (24 miles Sw of Calgary)	R	1891 1900 1904 1916 1923	1863-1943	MC
Malinda Moore	GB21	Indiana, Pennsylvania	Strathmore	F	1912		M
Mrs. Hans Mollerud (Paulsness)	S23	Grafton, North Dakota. Parents from Norway Born in Minnesota	27 miles from Hanley 10 miles from Outlook	F	1905-1913	1874-	MC
Catharine Neil	GB12	Scotland	Grassy Lake (near Burdett)	R	1905-	-1953	M
Harriet Neville (Johnson)	S32	Hamilton, Ontario	Cottonwood, Saskatchewan (20 miles from Regina, near Condie)	F	1883-1914	1846-1927	MC
Anna Nichol	S21	Darlingford, Manitoba	Bateman, Saskatchewan, Gravelbourg area	F	1915-1945		M

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Maria Berthalda Gledhill Potter	S33	Ontario	Whitewood	F	1884-	1860-1951	M
Sophie Puckette (later Sophie Miles)	GB.7	Kansas,USA	Innisfree	F	1903-1908	1885-1971	SF
Alice Rendell	S.6	England	Barr Colony, Lloydminster	F	1903-1905	d.1944	MC
Emma Richards (Troth)	S31	Stourbridge, England	near Swift Current	F	Dec 1906	1881 -	MC
Georgina Jane Riley (Hounsfield)	GB20	London, England	Hillhurst, Hounsfield Heights (Calgary)	R		1843-1907	MC
Sarah Ellen Roberts	PM.2	Townada, Illinois	Talbot, Alberta	F	1906--1912	1852-	MC
Hilda Rose	PM.4	Chicago, USA	First in foothills of Rockies; then at Ft. Vermillion, Alberta	F	1905-		S*
Emma Lavina D. Rowe/Laws (Toellner)	GB16	Missouri	Reid Hills (Vulcan) 1911-1917 Ardenville 1918-1931	F	1911-1929, 32,35,37 6,37	1884-1955	M
Marie Rudd	PA.8	Town north of Oslo Norway	Near Boyle, Alberta 30 miles from Athabasca	F	1927		MC
Mary Russell (Beckwith)	GB.5	England	Lyon Cross Ranch, Drumheller 6 miles south of Munson	R	1909-1914	1877-1963	W
Mrs. M. Sartre	GB15	Rothsay, Minnesota	Dead Fish Creek, Alberta	F	1924		S*

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Alice Self (Carpenter), Later(1922)- Alice Hickey	S12	Alton, Hampshire, England (moved from Surrey, England	six miles from Bethune, Saskatchewan	F	1912	1884-	M
Margaret May Shaw (Frank)	GB13	Strathroy, Ontario	Cardston, Alberta	R	1900-	1877-after 1964	S*
Barbara Alice Slater	PA17	Colchester England	Stoppington, Alberta Later Boraco near Chinook	F	1911-1918	1884-	S*
Margaret Smith (Mackenzie)	S20	Edinburgh, Scotland	Battleford District - 50 miles from Battleford	F	1906	1866-	MC
Mrs. R. E. Sparks	PA18	Kirkwald, Ontario	42 miles from Bassano Alberta	F	1910-1918	1874-1945	MC
Evelyn Cartier Springett	PM.7	Montreal Sherbrooke, Quebec	New Oxley Ranch near MacLeod	R	1893-1903		M
Mrs. T. St John	PM.8	Omaha	2 miles from Wilcox, Sask	F	1902-1904		M
Mrs. Stedman	GB22	Ontario	Pincher Creek	R	1884	1865	S*
Elone Stobaugh (Holtzman)	PA19	Born in Sidney, Montana came from Kansas City, Missouri	Deadwood, 75 miles from Peace River	F	1929-1932	1906-	MC
Kathleen Strange	PM.5	London, England	Fenn, Alberta	F	1920-1930		MC
Maria Szmyrko	PA11	Poland	Boyle, Alberta 30 miles from Athabasca	F	1930-		MC

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Mary K. Tennis	S22	Kansas City (orig from Texas)	21 miles N of Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan	F	1926-1947		M
Margaret Charlotte Falkson Thompson	PA15	Germany	Fort Assinboine	F	1919-1930	1892-1983	S
Esme Tuck (Gardiner)	GB.1	England	Pouce Coupe Peace River Valley	F	1919-1957	1887-after 1970	M
Lillian Turner (Hyde)	GB.4	Bealton, Ontario	Herschel, Saskatchewan	F	1906-1908	1884-1969	M
Mary Unger	PA14	Stuttgart Germany	Olds, Alberta	F	1924-		MC
Margaret Ward	GB24	Perth, Ontario	East Range Ranche (22 miles) from St. Francis	R	1884		M
Mrs. Edward Watson	PM11	Minnesota, USA	Craik, Saskatchewan	F	1905		MC
Beatrice Whitehair	PA12	Romsgo Worchesters hire England	Olds (1915) 16 miles east of Olds	F	1907-farm in 1915	1879-	M
Mrs. Alfred Wilson (Kerr)	GB27	Quebec	Pincher Creek	R	1889-		S*
Eliza Jane Wilson (Brown)	GB.2	Scotland	Circus Coulee, Dorothy	R	1901-1904	18	SF
Magdalena Zeidler	PA13	Russian from Romania	Maiden, 16 mi east of Olds, Alberta later Garlu, Alberta	F	1910-	1886-	M

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HOMESTEAD REGULATIONS

HOMESTEAD ENTRIES.

Any even numbered section of Dominion lands in Manitoba or the North-west Territories (excepting 8 and 26) which has not been homesteaded, reserved to provide wood-lots for settlers, or for other purposes, is available for homestead entry.

A homestead entry for one quarter section, containing 160 acres, more or less, can be obtained by any male over 18 years of age on payment of a fee of $10.

A woman who is a widow, having minor children dependent upon her, is entitled to a homestead entry.

Entry may be made personally at the local land office for the district within which the land to be taken is situate, or if the homesteader desires he may, on application to the Minister of the Interior, Ottawa, the Commissioner of Immigration, Winnipeg, or the local agent for the District, receive authority for some one to make entry for him.

All homestead fees must be paid to the local agent.

HOMESTEAD DUTIES.

A settler who has been granted entry for a homestead is required by the provisions of the Dominion Lands Act and the Amendments thereto, to perform the conditions connected therewith, under one of the following plans:—

(1.) At least six months' residence upon and cultivation of the land in each year during the term of three years.

It is the practice of the department to require a settler to bring 15 acres under cultivation, but if he prefers he may substitute stock; and 20 head of cattle, to be actually his own property, with buildings for their accommodation, will be accepted instead of the cultivation.

(2.) A settler may reside with his parents instead of upon his homestead, provided they occupy farming land in the vicinity, and he can count this time as residence after the date of his entry.

(3.) A settler may reside upon his first homestead instead of upon his second homestead if he prefer it, provided it is in the vicinity, the time to count from a date subsequent to the second entry.

(4.) If the settler has his permanent residence upon farming land owned by him in the vicinity of his homestead, the requirements of the Act as to residence may be satisfied by residence upon the said land.

The term 'vicinity' used above is meant to indicate the same township or an adjoining or cornering township.

A settler who avails himself of clauses (2), (3) or (4) must cultivate 30 acres of his homestead, or substitute 20 head of stock, with buildings for their accommodation, and have besides 80 acres substantially fenced.

No applications to vary the homestead provisions can be entertained, as such are established by Act of Parliament.

Every homesteader who fails to comply with the requirements of the homestead law is liable to have his entry cancelled, and the land may be again thrown open for entry.

APPLICATIONS FOR PATENT

should be made at the end of three years before the local agent, sub-agent or Homestead Inspector. Before making application for patent the settler must give six months notice in writing to the Commissioner of Dominion Lands at Ottawa of his intention.

In the case of a deceased homesteader any duties still required may be performed by the legal representatives or some person appointed by them to do so, and when completed to the satisfaction of the Commissioner of Dominion Lands the patent will be issued to the personal representative after letters of administration or probate of the will have been filed in the Department.

To His Excellency, The Governor General Of Canada, In Council:

THE PETITION of the undersigned residents of the Dominion of Canada, HUMBLY SHEWETH that:

1. **Whereas** The Dominion Lands Act provides that any person who is the head of a family, or a male who is over the age of eighteen years, may homestead a quarter section of available Dominion lands;

2. **And Whereas** only women who are widows and who have infant children living may secure homesteads;

3. **And Whereas** experience has shown that widows have made successful and desirable settlers;

4. **And Whereas** many women, including widows without infant children and unmarried women, both Canadian born and British, possessing means, are most desirous of, and would take advantage of the right to homestead;

5. **And Whereas** the country would be greatly benefited thereby through the fostering of education of health through the ordinary graces of living, and the greater encouragement of a better class of male settlers;

6. **And Whereas** the Homestead Law discriminates against the man having daughters, providing a birthright dowry only for the homesteader whose children are sons, and none for the homesteader whose children are daughters, and the accident of sex thereby enriches one family and impoverishes the other;

7. **And Whereas** many of the women of Canada, although unable to homestead have entered callings where they do secure their own livelihood, and have thereby contributed their share to the growth and prosperity of the country, it is reasonable to assume that, given the homestead privilege, their consequent action will justify this expansion of favors;

8. **And Whereas** such women have to bear their share of the cost of government, and have largely helped to make Dominion lands valuable, but are nevertheless denied any heritage in them;

9. **And Whereas** the privilege of homesteading would afford them an easy, healthful and economic method of securing an independent livelihood;

10. **And Whereas** the trend of population is flowing, injuriously to Canada, toward congestion in towns and cities; and all over North America the great cry is, "Get back to the land";

11. **And Whereas** homesteads to women would draw the population back to the land,

Now, Therefore, Your Petitioners Humbly Pray:

That as soon as possible a Bill may be introduced by your Government and enacted by the Parliament of Canada, providing that all women of British birth who have resided in Canada for one year and if residing with their father or mother or a near relative and are of the age of eighteen years, or if otherwise, are of the age of twenty-one years, shall be granted the privilege of homesteading.

And your petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

Dated this 21st day of November A.D., 1913

NAME	ADDRESS	OCCUPATION
A W. Henderson	Dominion Creek	Homesteader.
W G Hill	Saskatoon	Farmer
A J Watts	Strasburg	Homesteader
E Lake	Strasburg	Homesteader
Ray Leslie.	Strasburg	Farmer
L E Beardsley	Strasburg	Farmer
Wilbur White	Strasburg	Farmer
Samuel Kelly	Malone Ontario	Farmer
Wm Cambridge	Winnipeg Man	Farmer